

Jordan Times

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Israel bans doctor from travel

TEL AVIV (R) — Israel has prohibited travel abroad for a prominent Israeli Arab doctor who acted as an intermediary with the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). Ahmed Tibi, a gynaecologist, said Friday he had planned to go to Egypt with his family this week but received a three-month travel ban from the interior ministry which said his trip could harm state security. Tibi said he was to have met senior Egyptian officials including Osama Al Baz, political adviser to President Hosni Mubarak. "Whoever protests at prohibitions on Jews leaving other countries can't behave this way against me and my people especially when I am an Israeli citizen. If I did something illegal, put me on trial," Tibi told Reuters. "I believe that they thought I was possibly going to meet the PLO but it was a private visit," said Tibi, who was given a two-month travel ban last July. Tibi was named as a middleman in alleged illegal contacts last year between former Science Minister Ezer Weizman and the PLO on Israel's proposal to hold elections in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip. Tibi, 33, has also mediated in Israeli-Arab contacts for prisoner exchanges.

Bush orders Egypt's \$7b debt cancelled

WASHINGTON (AP) — President George Bush Friday ordered forgiveness of Egypt's \$7-billion in military debts as a reward for the country for its cooperation with the U.S. in the Gulf. The president said the move was a "gesture of goodwill" and said the action was necessary for "the success of the Desert Shield," the code name for the U.S. military operation in the Gulf. Bush's action, announced by the Treasury Department and Pentagon, would reduce the debt to zero, put into effect the debt forgiveness which Congress approved as part of this year's foreign aid package.

More than 250 Soviets leave Iraq

BAGHDAD (AP) — More than 250 Soviets left Iraq Friday and Soviet Deputy Premier Igor Belousov met with Iraqi leaders seeking an agreement to terminate Soviet companies' contracts with Iraq, officials reported. The Soviets left aboard an Aeroflot Il-86 airliner shortly after midnight (2100 GMT Thursday) about 1,000 others will be on their way to the Soviet Union by Jan. 10, five days before the deadline set by the United Nations for Iraq to withdraw its troops from Kuwait or face military action by U.S.-led multinational forces. Soviet diplomats said Belousov met with Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Saadoun Hamadi, a close associate of President Saddam Hussein, for talks on "bilateral relations."

Soviet deputies concerned over Gulf

MOSCOW (AP) — The Soviet parliament has urged a peaceful solution to the Gulf crisis but reiterated the country's support for the U.N. resolution on the use of force to drive Iraq out of Kuwait. On the last day of its 10-session that was consumed with domestic political changes, the 2,250-member Congress of the People's Deputies approved a compromise resolution that affirmed "support for relevant U.N. Security Council resolutions which were adopted after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait," according to the state news agency TASS. Legislators called on Iraq "to display high responsibility for the destiny of its people and to fulfill demands of the international community based on the rules of civilized life and legality." TASS said the resolution expressed support for the policies and decisions taken by the Kremlin leadership.

Americans can dial for Gulf protest

NEW YORK (R) — For \$10 a month, a new toll telephone number, Americans can get all the latest news on protests against U.S. military involvement in the Gulf. The number, 1-800-44-NO-WAR, provides an update on protests and reaps a donation for the Coalition to Stop U.S. Military Intervention in the Middle East. The coalition says the phone number, which has been operating about 10 days, has raised thousands of dollars.

Alaska pipeline security beefed up

ANCHORAGE (R) — Security along the United States' trans-Alaska pipeline has been increased because of possible sabotage by backers of Iraq, officials said. The threat of war in the Gulf has led officials to evaluate security for the 1,300-mile pipeline that delivers 550,000 barrels of oil a day, a rented pipeline, to the U.S. production. Federal officials said at least one driver of a stolen vehicle, threatening to sabotage the pipeline, was arrested. The stolen vehicle was a white Buick Wildcat. The stolen series was a Buick Wildcat. The stolen series was a Buick Wildcat. The stolen series was a Buick Wildcat.

Israeli terror group attacks Palestinians, vows more assaults

Combined agency dispatches

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM — A Jewish vigilante group that claimed responsibility for shooting three Palestinians in a roadside ambush warned it would launch more attacks on Arabs, an Israeli journalist said Friday. Reporter Roni Shaked of the Yedioth Ahronoth daily said an anonymous caller told him an hour after the shooting Thursday night that "this is the first activity of the group, and there are going to be more attacks, and much worse than this."

Israel expects 40,000 emigres this month

TEL AVIV (AP) — Israel in December will register the highest monthly total of immigrants in its 42-year history as a result of a surge in Soviet arrivals, an Israeli immigration official said Friday. Simha Diniz, head of the quasi-government Jewish Agency, told a news conference that about 35,000 Soviets would be among the 40,000 Jews coming in December, "a record month in the history of immigration in Israel."

Iran demands U.S. pullout from Gulf, urges regional solution

NICOSIA (Agencies) — Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani warned Friday that the Gulf is in imminent danger of war and urged the United States to pull out troops from the region and let the Gulf states resolve the crisis. Tehran Radio quoted Rafsanjani as saying in a prayer sermon at Tehran University that both Iraq and the United States should end their aggression. "Iran reiterates that the aggression on Kuwait be ended, Iraqi forces return to Iraq and arrogant forces, especially the U.S., who have come to the region with this pretext with dangerous weapons, also end their aggression."

punished." Avi Pazner, a spokesman for Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, called the attack "shocking."

He noted, however, that the influx was creating major housing problems and said the government should take over construction to resolve the crisis. The government expects more than 200,000 immigrants this year, about 90 per cent of the Soviets. The total will be second only to 1949, when more than 239,000 immigrants arrived in the new state. Soviets have been pouring into Israel since the spring of 1989, when the Soviet Union eased its policy on exit permits. Diniz said the pace has accelerated in recent weeks because of increasing uncertainty in the Soviet Union and better transportation arrangements by Israel. The Jewish Agency assists the Israeli government in transporting and resettling immigrants.

Still locked under a Western arms embargo, Iran is nevertheless engaged in an ambitious effort to rebuild its dilapidated military. Tehran Television Thursday showed off Tehran's latest arms procurement: Advanced Soviet-made SA-6 anti-aircraft missiles for the air wing of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps. The acquisition of the mobile, radar-guided SA-6s is a big boost for Iran's badly depleted military, which suffers from a chronic shortage of advanced weapons. The Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) said graduates instructed in use of the weapons system test fired an SA-6 at a military base Thursday.

Israeli license plates driven by someone else, she said. The army said no soldiers were involved in the incident. Most Israeli men serve in the army reserves until they are in their 50s and have easy access to army uniforms and weapons. The caller who telephoned Shaked claimed responsibility in the name of a group calling itself the "Zionist Avengers."

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AP) — About 300 European, American and Israeli women held a silent protest Friday against Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip to open an international women's peace conference. The visitors bolstered a weekly protest by Israelis known as the Women in Black, but several protesters noted participation in this year's peace conference was deeply cut by the Gulf crisis and growing violence in Israel. Among the foreigners was a 16-woman delegation from the United States whose members said they were protesting Israel's "apartheid-like treatment of the Palestinians."

Iran, which has the most powerful army in the region after Iraq, aspires to lead a regional force to police the Gulf, according to earlier statement made by Rafsanjani. Western analysts believe the Iranians fear that a long-term presence of U.S. forces in the region would threaten those ambitions. Shaul Bakhash, a history professor in the United States who has written extensively on Iran,



PROTEST IN AMMAN: Women waving flags and banners demonstrate in front of the U.N. office in Amman Friday

against the interception by the multinational forces in the Gulf of an Iraq-bound peace ship (See story on page 3)

Women's meeting protests Israeli occupation

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Iraq and U.S. say no change, no compromise

Combined agency dispatches

IRAQ AND the United States refused to budge in the Gulf crisis, ruling out any compromise and saying there was no progress towards last gasp-peace talks to avert a new year war over Kuwait. "No compromise on anything," U.S. President George Bush told reporters as a 17-ship American task force headed for the Gulf to bolster the multinational war machine ranged against Iraq.

IRAQI FRIDAY test-fired a surface-to-surface missile for the second time this week, shooting it away from multinational forces in Saudi Arabia, the U.S. central command said. "The firing appeared to be part of an additional testing or training mission," said Casey Mahon, a central command spokesman. Mahon said the missile landed in Iraq. He could not comment on the alert status of the 300,000 U.S. troops in Operation Desert Shield during the firing. Additional details about the flight path or the kind of missile were also not released. Reporters visiting the hospital ship USNS Mercy said crew members went on a heightened state of alert around noon because of the missile launch, carrying their protective gear against chemical weapons with them. Land-based troops have already been on a heightened alert because of the possibility of an attack over the Christmas and New Year holidays. Iraq test-fired a missile Wednesday under nearly identical circumstances, the U.S. military said. The test firing of an Israeli missile into the Mediterranean last Friday also prompted a low-level alert for a chemical attack. British and U.S. military officials reported that Iraq test-fired several Scud missiles from east to west on Dec. 2. Fired north to south, the missiles would hit Saudi Arabia. The Los Angeles Times reported last week that the Dec. 2 Iraqi test-firing of three

on Thursday: "There's nothing going on." Jassem said it was up to the United States to make the first move to start talks. "We are ready for any change in the situation from the American side," he said. Bush wants to open a dialogue before Jan. 3. He has rejected Iraq's insistence Jan. 12 for meeting U.S. Secretary of State James Baker as too close to the deadline for possible war. NATO's top general said meanwhile the multi-national "Desert Shield" force in the Gulf will be ready to push Iraq out of Kuwait after Jan. 15 if required. "I think the forces will be ready if necessary by Jan. 15," U.S. General John Galvin, NATO's supreme allied commander Europe, told journalists Friday as he watched U.S. army trucks being loaded at Rotterdam aboard ships bound for the Gulf. A convoy of 17 warships carrying 16,000 forces began leaving the United States on Friday for the Gulf, less than three weeks before the U.N. deadline. Bush has dismissed reports that the United States is still

medium-range missiles reportedly took U.S. military officials by surprise. The first launch of the series was completed before American satellites and sensors noticed it, the Times reported, and Israeli and U.S. officials readied their air forces for attack. Israeli sources said the Dec. 2 tests were carried out on an updated version of the Al Hussein missile, an Iraqi variant of the Scud-B with an extended range of 600 kilometres. Three missiles were launched, the sources said. Officials have expressed concern that the pressure of the Jan. 15 U.N. deadline allowing the use of force against Iraq might prompt Baghdad to launch a pre-emptive strike. Iraq has threatened to hit Israel first to split the Arab and Western coalition ranged against it. The Iraqis are believed to have up to 1,000 surface-to-surface missiles of various types, either Soviet-built SS-1 Scud-Bs or Iraqi variants of that weapon. Baghdad bought about 2,000 Scud-Bs from Moscow during the 1980-88 Gulf war and launched scores during that conflict. It is not known whether Iraq's missiles are capable of carrying chemical warheads, although there have been reports that they have deployed some chemical warheads with their Scud-Bs.

weeks away from being ready to mount a full military strike. Officials were quoted Friday as saying Bush favours a quick war to save American lives. U.S. Defence officials were reported Friday to be planning inoculations for troops against biological warfare. Sailors and marines began leaving U.S. ports for the Gulf on Friday aboard 17 ships, including the aircraft carriers America and Theodore Roosevelt from the Norfolk naval base in Virginia. Navy officials said it should be a two-week voyage, meaning the ships would arrive before the Jan. 15 deadline. Aircraft carriers on station in the Middle East region are the USS Saratoga in the Eastern Mediterranean, the USS Midway in the Arabian Sea and the USS Kennedy in the Red Sea. The deployment of such a large number of U.S. warships to one part of the world is unprecedented since the Vietnam war. The Defence Department said U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia and

TV censors call off Shevardnadze programme

MOSCOW (R) — Broadcasting officials Friday cancelled a television programme about the resignation of Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze. Alexander Lyubimov, presenter of the popular weekly Vzglad (View), said the cancellation of Friday's edition was especially troubling at a time when the country was taking a conservative turn. Shevardnadze, an architect of reform under President Mikhail Gorbachev, resigned last week saying the Soviet Union was heading towards dictatorship. He denounced his critics as "reactionary." A spokeswoman for Vid, the company that produces Vzglad, said a statement would be read before the programme's usual broadcast time to explain why it had been cancelled. "In essence, the announcement will say the programme was cancelled by the leadership of the state committee for radio and television because of... a difference in opinion over events of the past year," she told Reuters by telephone. "...A difference between the leadership and the authors (of the programme)."

The Arab World for Maintenance and General Services

Tel: 612702

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Middle East News

Arab allies fill front lines, but offensive role unclear

HAIFA, AL-BATIN, Saudi Arabia (AP) — The front line arrayed against Iraq is a mixed bag of Arab-Islamic forces whose role in the northern Saudi desert may be merely symbolic.

As the U.N.'s Jan. 15 deadline approaches for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait or face force, it's still not clear what part the Arab forces would play in a potentially bloody offensive.

More than 100,000 Saudis, Egyptians, Syrians, and other Arab forces have joined forces against Iraq.

Forces from Pakistan, Morocco, Bangladesh, Niger and Senegal have planted their flags on Saudi soil. Some contingents are little more than token forces.

Behind them are about 350,000 American, British and French troops with the firepower needed to hammer Iraq.

"If peace doesn't arrive, and if we're ordered by our supreme commanders, we can teach him a lesson he'll never forget," boasted Lt. Gen. Khalid Ben Sultan, a Saudi prince who commands the 115,000-strong Arab-Islamic force.

These are big ifs. Not all members of the Arab alliance will sound "charge" if the U.S.-led multinational force is ordered into Kuwait.

The Kuwaitis, of course, want their country back, but they won't fight in Iraq.

The Saudis will fight with the United States and its allies if invited by Kuwait. The Egyptians say they will do what the Saudis do.

The Syrians and others have said only that their role here is defensive and to stop aggression.

"It's clear that there are varying levels of commitment in terms of willingness to use offensive military action to achieve our objective," U.S. Defence Secretary Dick Cheney acknowledged recently.

What the Arabs will do if Iraq carries out its threat to attack Israel with missiles is another problem. It would be difficult for the Syrians and the Saudis to fight Iraq if it gets into a shoot-out with Israel.

The Arab states "that really count" are the Saudis and the Egyptians, Cheney said.

The Saudis have a 75,000-strong army and air force; the Egyptians have pledged 10,000 troops, including two armoured divisions.

The Egyptians and Syrians, who have sent an armoured division with their 20,000-man contingent, bring combat experience to the Saudi desert. Both have fought the Israelis and the Syrians have been in action in Lebanon.

But some analysts say the biggest contribution the Arab-Islamic force makes is symbolic — a stand that helps to silence criticism of Western forces occupying a land where Islam's holiest shrines are located.

The military show will be run by the Americans and the British because they have the experience and the firepower needed to breach Iraq's formidable defences in Kuwait.

The Arab alliance is "a useful show of political solidarity," said Ian Kemp, a military analyst with Jane's Defence Weekly.

"But if it comes to an offensive operation, I don't think they'll play anything but a marginal role. The Americans and the British will play the lead."

Some expect a force of Kuwaitis and Saudis to spearhead the U.S.-British effort as a political gesture.

"This will allow the Arab-Islamic forces to say they were the ones who liberated Kuwait City," said Tony Banks, political editor for Jane's.

"But when it comes to real thing, the Americans and the British will bear the brunt of it."

By agreement, no offensive can be launched from Saudi soil without the consent of King Fahd and U.S. President George Bush.

In the defensive configuration, Prince Khalid serves as co-commander of the 28-nation force with Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf, the U.S. commander.

"If there's any bloodshed, I can assure you Saudi forces will be the first to spill it," Khalid stressed recently. "If anyone touches my land, you will see vicious soldiers who will do their job well."

Kuwait and Iraq closed out the year at the United Nations Thursday by challenging each other's membership in the world body, each writing to the secretary-general about the alleged illegitimacy of the other.

However, neither delegation demanded any specific action from the General Assembly, whose members in any case would probably reject such requests, officials said.

Iraq, which invaded and occupied Kuwait on Aug. 2, said in its note, released Wednesday, that the "felicitous union produced by the merger of Iraq and Kuwait" made them once again a single state and said the two therefore should be represented by a single U.N. delegation.

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Kuwait was quick to respond and on Thursday sent its own letter to the secretary-general.

The document, not yet officially released, said Kuwait was entering an official reservation on the Iraqi delegation's credentials because Baghdad was "not a peace-loving regime, had committed crimes against humanity and therefore 'had no place in an organization'."

The credentials committee has completed its report but its acceptance by the General Assembly was postponed.

Kuwait and Iraq fight over credentials at U.N.

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Dozens killed in mystery attack in Somali capital

MOGADISHU (R) — Several dozen people were killed Friday in heavy fighting between government troops and an armed gang who attacked a fuel depot in a northern suburb of the Somali capital, witnesses said.

"The extent of damage to the depot is not yet known... it is not even clear who is fighting whom," one witness told Reuters.

"But the place is littered with dozens of dead bodies, in military fatigues and civilian clothes."

Witness said there were about six attackers. State-run Mogadishu Radio said the gang fled, leaving behind a car, rifle, and two hand grenades.

Witnesses said mortars and automatic rifles were used in the fighting at the depot, in the Mogadishu suburb of Argim.

Ambulances with sirens blaring carried wounded soldiers from the battleground to the government hospital, witnesses said.

A journalist living in the district said security forces had made many arrests, and troops had surrounded the area.

Earlier this week, heavily-armed police and security personnel were combing parts of Mogadishu for arms and explosives after eight policemen were killed in an ambush.

There has been an upsurge of violence in Mogadishu in recent weeks, with several rebel groups intensifying their fight to overthrow President Mohammad Siad Barre, who has ruled since 1969.

Build-up in Gulf hits American rural health

PALISADE, Colorado (AP) — The callup of reservists for the Gulf buildup is striking medical care hard in rural America, leaving some small towns without doctors and forcing retired physicians back to work.

Dr. Victor Hoefner, 70, was enjoying his retirement last month when his son, Victor C. Hoefner III, an army national guardman, was called up for duty in the Gulf.

Now the elder Hoefner has taken over his son's family practice in this western Colorado community.

The Defence Department won't say how many doctors have been called up, citing security. In addition to the activation of members of the army, navy and air force reser-

ves, the army has begun forcing some retired medical officers back into uniform.

The effect of the callup is quickly felt in small towns, and the indefinite duration of the crisis is adding to the problem, according to rural health experts.

"Are we talking three months, six months or a year?" asked Toby Turner, spokeswoman for the National Rural Health Association in Kansas City.

"Rural health has been in crisis anyway, and losing 50 per cent of your small hospital's staff at one time is just too much of a blow. The military is just filling slots in these units without paying any attention to a medical reservist's role at home."

Cheney was "not displeased" by Waller's comments. Some officials said U.S. air power would be fully prepared for a strike even if ground troops were not.

Then Cheney himself said that "soon after Jan. 15," the U.S. forces would be "in a position to take military action in conjunction with our allies."

Bush entered the readiness fray on Saturday, stating that he could launch an attack in 10 minutes.

The varying statements caused speculation that the administration was deliberately trying to put Iraq off balance. Fitzwater told reporters that "it never hurts to build in a little uncertainty about what our intentions are as it relates to Jan. 15."

Administration officials have stressed that Jan. 15 is not a strike date, but merely an authorization date.

Asked what message he wanted Iraq to get on the readiness issue, Bush said Thursday, "We are going to fully implement the United Nations resolutions," which include one authorizing use of force.

A senior administration official said, meantime, it has been decided not to talk about readiness any more.

Asked for an indication of which of the various statements represented the real administration position, the official said only, "I would take the president's comments most seriously."

As to Bush's statement that he could go to war in 10 minutes, the official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said, "his is the last word."

MIDDLE EAST NEWS IN BRIEF

Morocco opens probe into rioting

RABAT (AP) — The Moroccan parliament has created a special commission to investigate nationwide rioting two weeks ago. The commission numbers 25 ruling party and opposition legislators, including two representing the main labour unions that called the Dec. 14 general strike. The 206-member parliament ordered the probe late Thursday after majority members agreed to allow 10 opposition deputies onto the commission. Official sources meanwhile stated that 670 people have been investigated in connection with the disturbances, and the number could rise in coming days. Courts sentenced at least 87 to stiff jail sentences Tuesday and Wednesday in Tangiers, Meknes and Fez. The rioting Dec. 14-15 broke out in several cities in their country during a long-planned general strike by the nation's two largest labour unions. Fez, the country's spiritual and intellectual capital, was the site of the most extensive violence. Soldiers and police intervened as rioters attacked hotels, post offices and a police station. The government has said that five people were killed in the violence in Fez and 127 injured, claim about 30 people were killed.

Warships save sinking Iranian coaster

RAS AL KHAIMAH (AP) — The Norwegian coast guard cutter Andenes, aided by a French warship, saved a small Iranian coaster from sinking early Friday near the Strait of Hormuz, gateway to the Gulf. The freighter, the Amadi-22, sprang a leak as it was sailing from Dubai to the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas with a cargo of sugar. The Norwegian cutter, which has a crew of 80 volunteers, responded when the Iranians fired six red distress flares. Amid Skram, the cutter's commander, said in a radio conversation that the incident occurred northwest of the port of Mina Sagr in the southern Gulf. He declined to give other details for security reasons. The Andenes is part of the U.S.-led multinational naval force enforcing the United Nations economic embargo against Iraq.

Tunisian Islamic leader sentenced to jail

TUNIS (R) — A Tunis court has sentenced Islamic leader Mohammad Al Akrouf to five months in prison for spreading false news likely to disturb the peace, a spokesman for the Islamic Nahdha Movement said. Akrouf, a member of the Nahdha's 20-strong founding committee, was arrested in October in connection with a speech he recorded on video for distribution among Nahdha members. In the speech, he commented on the death of a student shot by police during a demonstration in September. His lawyers said he merely reported the facts of the killing. His arrest was part of the first wave of a crackdown on the Islamic movement, which has no legal status. The Nahdha says more than 200 members and sympathizers have been detained in a second wave which started last Sunday.

Two leftist bombers killed in Istanbul

ISTANBUL (R) — Two left-wing extremists trying to plant bombs outside a government office were killed when the devices exploded in their hands, the Anatolian news agency said. The bombs went off on Thursday night as a group of five people planted them in the car park of the state supplies office (DMO) in Istanbul's Kadikoy district. The outlawed group Dev-Sol (Revolutionary Left), which is active mainly in Istanbul, said in telephone calls to newspapers that its members were involved. A third member of the group, a woman, was taken to hospital with serious injuries after the blast, which set vehicles ablaze. Flames spread to the DMO building but were extinguished before they caused major damage. Two other men in the group escaped in a car. Police found five unexploded bombs and two drums of petrol at the scene.

Belgium warns nationals to avoid Gulf

BRUSSELS (R) — Belgium's foreign ministry has warned its nationals to avoid the Gulf region if at all possible and to take precautions if staying there was unavoidable. A statement said that given Iraq's refusal to leave Kuwait, the visiting of countries around a potential war zone could not be seen as risk-free. It said its advice was "a precautionary measure, and does not prejudice possible developments in the situation." It advised what it called common-sense measures. Tourists should not go to the region at all, and families of residents should leave danger zones, at least temporarily. Business travellers should only go there if this was unavoidable, and should limit their stays. Residents should stay only if their presence was professionally essential, it said. Residents and visitors were strongly advised to let the appropriate embassy or consulate know of their exact movements.

Quake hits Iran's Caspian province

NICOSIA (R) — A tremor measuring 4.4 on the open-ended Richter scale shook parts of Iran's Caspian province of Gilan Friday, six months after the area was devastated by a major earthquake. The Iranian News Agency IRNA said the quake struck at 7.34 a.m. (0404 GMT) and was centred 230 kilometres northwest of Tehran. It made no mention of damage or casualties. The area has been hit by dozens of tremors since the quake measuring 7.3 on the Richter scale killed 35,000 people in Gilan and neighbouring Zanjan province on June 21.

Tunisian news agency gets new chief

TUNIS (AP) — Ali Belarbi, a senior official of the information ministry, has been named to head the Tunisian Press Agency (TAP), an official source said. Belarbi replaces Abdallah Amami, who is leaving TAP to become chief of the newly created Agency of External Communication, whose mission is to improve the exchange of information about Tunisia abroad, the source said. Belarbi, 52, has served as chief cabinet officer of the Information Ministry since March. He has a doctorate in sociology and has worked in radio and national television.

Rabbi's comments spark uproar among Israelis

TEL AVIV (AP) — An ultra-orthodox rabbi considered a political kingmaker has enraged religious and secular Israelis by saying the holocaust was God's punishment for sins such as violating the Sabbath and eating pork.

"Not for a long time has any single remark caused such an emotional reaction," said Razi Barkai, host of a radio talk show that was flooded with hundreds of calls Thursday over the remarks of rabbi Eliezer Schach.

Barkai said calls ran about 3-to-2 against the 97-year-old rabbi, who said another disaster may befall Jews for violating traditional religious tenets.

"The last time he brought destruction, it was the holocaust... because of the sins, the Almighty may bring another holocaust upon us, and it may already be tomorrow," Schach told Jewish Seminary students earlier this week.

"Rabbi Schach today is one of the most powerful men in Israeli politics and each one of his words create a lot of noise," said sociologist Menachem Friedman, an expert on religious communities.

Earlier this year, Schach — the spiritual mentor of Degel Hatorah (Torah Flag party) and Shas (Torah Guardians) — helped Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir form a government by ordering his followers to join Shamir's coalition. The faction's support gave Shamir 60 votes in the 120-member parliament.

In exchange, the party asked for a series of reform laws, including a ban on sexually suggestive ads and sale of pork, forbidden by Jewish dietary laws.

The Knesset (parliament), earlier this month outlawed outdoor advertising that features scantily clad people. It is expected to take up some of the other proposals soon.

The proposed laws have angered many secular Israelis, who claim the ultra-orthodox minority carries too much influence.

Schach's comments on the holocaust were repeating a theme common in the Bible: Of divine retribution against the Jewish people for straying from the path of their religious law.

But many took his remarks to mean that the Jews somehow were to blame for the Nazis' behaviour.

"The Almighty keeps a balance sheet of the world, and when the sins become too many, he brings destruction. We don't know how long his patience holds out, sometimes 20 years, sometimes 10 and sometimes only a year," Schach said.

Schach's chief rival, New York-based rabbi Menachem Schneersohn, told supporters the holocaust was "pure and holy."

"Heaven forbid someone should say that the Jews sinned in some way and God settled accounts with them and imposed on them the most terrible sentence of the past generation," said Schneersohn, the influential leader of the Hasidic Habad movement.

Some of Schach's sharpest critics were holocaust survivors. Menachem Russak, a survivor of the Auschwitz camp and a former commander of the Israeli police unit investigating Nazi war crimes, said Schach "shamed and humiliated" holocaust victims.

His voice shaking, Russak told listeners that Schach "not only exonerated the Nazi murderers, but turned them into messengers of God who were sent to punish the people of Israel for not observing the Torah."

But another caller, an ultra-orthodox woman who lost relatives in the holocaust, defended the rabbi.

"With all the pain I have, I can understand his words. We believe in the link between sin and punishment," said the woman, who did not give her name.

Afghan anniversary passes quietly

KABUL (R) — The 11th anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan passed off without official mention in Kabul — but the war which has claimed a million-and-a-half Afghan lives rumbled on.

There were no public speeches or gatherings to mark the anniversary in the capital Thursday.

"We don't want to remember the events of December 1979 — events which have brought so much tragedy to our country," said a senior Foreign Ministry official.

Soviet troops seized key buildings in Kabul on Dec. 27, 1979, in an attempt to bolster Afghanistan's Marxist government which had come to power in a coup a year earlier.

The country was plunged into a bitter war between the Soviet-backed Kabul government and Western-backed Mujahideen guerrillas.

Soviet troops were withdrawn in February 1989 and Kremlin leader Mikhail Gorbachev denounced their intervention.

The withdrawal failed to bring peace, however, and the Mujahideen are still trying to overthrow Afghan President Najibullah.

Fighting was continuing this week about 30 kilometres south of Kabul, where the rebels attacked government posts along a defence line several days ago.

On Thursday, heavy exchanges of artillery and rocket fire were heard in the centre of the capital until midnight, shaking doors and windows and breaking the silence of the Kabul Valley, which has had the first heavy snowfall of winter.

"Instead of remembering the Soviet invasion, we want to emphasise the spirit of national reconciliation," one Afghan journalist commented.

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

JORDAN TELEVISION	
Tel: 773111-19	
PROGRAMME ONE	
15:00	Telecast
15:30	Koran
15:45	Programme review
15:55	Children's programme
17:30	Educational programme
18:00	News Summary
18:10	Local series
19:50	Programme review
20:00	News in Arabic
20:30	Arabic series
21:30	Programme review
21:50	Local programme
22:00	Arabic series
22:40	News in Arabic
23:10	Series continued
PROGRAMME TWO	
18:00	Le Ciel de Fort Boyard
19:00	News in French
19:15	Aujourd'hui en France
20:00	News in Arabic
20:30	Good Morning Misa Biss
21:00	Encounter
21:30	Feature film: "Cloud Dancer"
22:40	News in English
22:50	Continuation of the film
PRAYER TIMES	
05:00	Fajr
06:30	(Sunrise) Dhuha
14:22	Dhuhr
16:45	Asr
18:47	Maghrib
19:10	Isha

CHURCHES	
St. Mary of Nazareth Church Swellish, Tel. 810740	
Assemblies of God Church, Tel. 637785	
St. Joseph Church Tel. 624990, Church of the Association Tel. 637440	
De la Salle Church Tel. 661757	
Terrence Church Tel. 623566	
Church of the Association Tel. 623541	
Anglican Church Tel. 623583, Tel. 628543	
Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 771331	
Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 771331	
St. Ephraim Church Tel. 771751	
Assyrian International Church Tel. 655326	
Evangelical Lutheran Church Tel. 811295	
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints Tel. 815817, 649532	
WEATHER	
Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology.	
It will be partly cloudy and there will be a chance for scattered showers of rain. Winds will be southeasterly moderate to fresh. In Aqaba, winds will be northerly moderate and seas calm.	
JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR	
Min/max temp.	
Amman	3 / 11
Aqaba	11 / 21
Dead Sea	2 / 12
Jordan Valley	9 / 18
Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 9, Aqaba 21. Humidity readings: Amman 52 per cent, Aqaba 20 per cent.	
USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS	
NIGHT DUTY	
AMBULANCE	
Dr. Yusuf Rashid	669917
Dr. Yusuf Rashid	896301
Dr. Mustafa Tannous	864480
Dr. Mohammed Abu Ma'rouf	793344
Firas pharmacy	661512
Al Aqaba pharmacy	778256
Al Aqaba pharmacy	637055
Nasrallah pharmacy	623672
Al Salama pharmacy	636730
Yacoub pharmacy	644945
Shamsiah pharmacy	676660
FIRE	
Dr. Mohammed Al Za'bi	(—)
AL SHARAF pharmacy (985238)	
ZARQA:	
Dr. Ghassan Al Fakhri	(—)
Khalifah pharmacy	985417
EMERGENCIES	
Food Control Centre	637111
Civil Defence Department	661111
Civil Defence Immediate	630341
Civil Defence Emergency	199
Rescue Police	192, 621111, 637777
Fire Brigade	891228
Red Cross	775121
Highway Police	834302
Traffic Police	896290
Public Security Department	630321
Hotel Complaints	605800
Price Complaints	661176
Water and Sewerage	661176
Complaints	897467
Amman Municipality	637111
Complaints	787111
Telephone Information	121
Overseas Calls	010230
Central Amman Telephone	623101
Repairs	623101
Abdali Telephone Repairs	
Jordan Television	773111
Radio Jordan	774111
Water Authority	680100
Jordan Electricity Authority	615615
Electric Power	63681
RJ Flight Information	06-53200
Quebec Airs Ltd. Airport	06-53200
HOSPITALS	
AMMAN:	
Hassan Medical Centre	813813/32
Khalid Maternity, J. Amn.	642816
Khalid Maternity, J. Amn.	642412
Jabali Maternity	642362
Mahab, J. Amn.	636140
Palestine, Shamsiah	664174
Shamsiah Hospital	669131
University Hospital	845845
Al-Munshir Hospital	667279
The Islamic, Abdali	666127/57
Al-Ahli, Abdali	666148
Italian, Al-Muhajirah	777013
Al-Badli, J. Ashraf	775111/26

Researchers to monitor local food industries

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Scientific Research Centre at the University of Jordan is now setting up several scientific teams, to monitor the quality of local food industries.

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At least 100 Jordanian women peace activists heading for Iraq by the U.S.-led war ships (photo by Youssef Al 'Allam)

Women peace activists protest seizure of peace ship in Gulf

AMMAN (J.T.) — At least 100 Jordanian women peace activists held a brief sit-in at the United Nations offices in Shmeisani Friday before moving to International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) office where they handed a memorandum to the head of the ICRC delegation in Jordan protesting the seizure of the peace ship by U.S.-led war ships in the Gulf area while on its way to Iraq.

The protesters carried posters denouncing the American move, voicing support for the Iraqi people and calling for peaceful settlement to the Gulf crisis.

Interviewed by the Jordan News Agency, Petra, women representatives expressed their condemnation of the American move which they described as criminal actions committed against the children of Iraq and a move meant to subdue the Arab people.

They called on peace-loving nations to support the current moves to provide assistance to the Iraqi people and children.

The memorandum, a copy of which will be sent to the U.N. secretary general, voiced solidarity with the Iraqi women and children in the face of the ongoing attempts on the part of the multinational force in the Gulf to starve them.

The Jordanian women organizations, the memo said, strongly deplore the interception and seizure of the peace ship and call on peace-loving nations and world organizations to help provide essential supplies to the innocent people of Iraq.

It said that while the Americans were trying to starve Iraq, the Israeli authorities were allowed and encouraged to commit atrocities on the people of the occupied Palestinian lands.

The memorandum said that the ICRC and the United Nations bore serious responsibilities in this matter and they should exercise their influence to allow the peace ship to continue its trip peacefully to Iraq.

U.S. marines landed on the peace ship Ben Khaldoun by helicopter firing warning shots and throwing smoke grenades in an attempt to control the women and children on board, according to reports from the Gulf region.

The 11,333 tonne general cargo vessel, which has carrying about 240 passengers and a 40-member Iraqi crew plus 800 tonnes of sugar and other food supplies, was intercepted in the Arabian Sea just before it was to pass through the Strait of Hormuz to sail up the Gulf to Iraq.

The women and children on board came from 10 Arab countries plus Italy, China the United States and Japan.

Meanwhile, Dr. Aida Al Jajir, head of the ship's informational committee, said that the Jordanian Palestinian women delegation who was scheduled to leave Amman Thursday for Baghdad had postponed the trip because of the seizure of the ship. She said that the delegation would be going to Iraq at a later date.

Representatives of professional associations in Jordan have already issued a statement condemning the interception of the peace ship as brutal action against mankind.

The seizure of the peace ship, the statement said, undermines the U.S. determination to maintain its aggressive policies against the Arab Nation. The statement appealed to the world community to oppose such action which, it said, violates international norms and the U.N. Charter.

A Jordanian journalist, Salim Masari, with his wife and four-year-old daughter are reported among those on board the peace ship whose whereabouts are unknown.

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Absolutely no new initiative, Iraqi ambassador to EC says

By P.V. Vivekanand
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Top-level meetings of Iraqi ambassadors last week were not aimed at crystallising any new initiative to break the deadlock in American-Iraqi contacts but were routine consultations between the Iraqi leadership and the envoys, according to Iraq's ambassador to the European Community (EC) headquarters in Brussels.

The ambassador, Zeid Haidar, who flew to Amman from Baghdad on his way back to Brussels Friday, said the Iraqi position remained firm that U.S. Secretary of State James Baker could visit Baghdad on Jan. 12 as originally proposed by Baghdad.

"The Iraqi stand is always the same," Haidar told reporters. "The only thing Iraq asks for is negotiations, dialogue and relations between problems of the region... linkage between all the problems of the area."

The sudden recall of about 15 Iraqi ambassadors from various world capitals to Baghdad, for meetings with President Saddam Hussein had raised speculation that Iraq could be preparing a fresh initiative to break the stalemate in efforts to resolve the Gulf crisis.

"We are for a peaceful solution if possible, but it seems to us that since the beginning of the crisis the U.S. and President Bush are escalating the position day by day politically and militarily," Ambassador Haidar said. This "gives the impression that no doubt war is some metres far, no more," he added.

The ambassador, who arrived here along with his country's envoys to the Netherlands, Britain, India and Austria, said there was "absolutely" no new Iraqi initiative to break the deadlock.

Iraq has no intention to change the proposed date for a Baker visit to Baghdad and it is now up to the U.S. to act in response to the expressed Iraqi desire to have the secretary visit the Iraqi capital three days before the Jan. 15 deadline set by the United Nations Security Council for Iraq to leave Kuwait or face war, he said.

"They have given their ultimatum through the U.N. Security Council, which (is) no more than one American department," Haidar said. "We did not recognize this. We are still insisting on a dialogue for a peaceful solution on the same principle to reach peace and stability for all."

Iraq continues to insist that any solution to the Gulf crisis should be linked with a settlement of the Palestinian problem, said Dr. Mamdouh Abbadi, spokesman for the Jordanian Arab National Democratic Alliance (JANDA).

The JANDA delegation, which included three members of the Lower House of Parliament and other political activists, visited Iraq as an expression of solidarity with the Iraqis, Abbadi told reporters.

In reply to a question, Abbadi said American and other targets might come under attack in many Arab countries in the event of an assault on Iraq by the multinational forces in the Gulf. But, he said, "Saddam Hussein is not calling for such attacks..."

In his meeting with the delegation, President Saddam pledged continued Iraqi support for the three-year-old Palestinian intifada. Asked how Iraq would extend such support, Abbadi would only say that "independence support for the intifada could come in many different ways."

The delegation also met with Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Taha Yassin Ramadan, Information Minister Latif Jassem and other Iraqi leaders.

Deputies Mansour Murad, Bassam Haddadin and Mohammad Fares Tarawneh were among the delegation members.

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AMMAN — A recent travel advisory for American government non-essential staff and their dependents in Jordan was seen as a precautionary measure against possible anti-American incidents should war erupt in the Gulf.

An American Embassy spokesman, Claude Young, said that the conditions resulting from the Gulf crisis gave the United States government reason to believe that anti-American incidents may take place in Jordan.

"With conditions resulting from the Gulf crisis, which have been intensified by the deadline set for Jan. 15 for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait, we think that anti-American incidents are more likely to happen," Young told the Jordan Times, refusing to use the word "war."

The U.S. State Department Wednesday ordered its non-essential staff to leave Jordan "well before Jan. 15," the deadline set by the Security Council for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait or face the use of force by the American-led military forces deployed in the Gulf. The latest advisory also warned American citizens not to travel to the Kingdom.

Jordanian officials refused to make an official statement on the American measure, saying that Jordan has always been a safe country for foreigners under any circumstances and there was no reason to fear incidents of violence.

A large number of U.S. Embassy staff also feel safe in Jordan and do not particularly agree with the State Department orders. White T-shirts, made by the non-essential staff, read in blue print: "I am essential" on the front and "No, no, I won't go" on the back.

If the U.S. government employees do not follow these orders, they may face being fired from their jobs.

The embassy was not immediately able to provide the number of Americans who have already left the Kingdom, but a U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) source told the Jordan Times that only three of its original 28 American staff remained in Jordan to date.

Packing and shipping companies have been busy since the first travel advisory was issued on Aug. 20 asking non-essential staff to leave on voluntary basis.

One of these companies, "Jordan Express," had to work a full day on Christmas day packing up for its American customers.

According to the manager of Jordan Express, Abba Majaj, "most of our customers have been American embassy staff and private American individuals."

"There have been several cases where families would give me the key and address of their homes to pack their things after they have departed the country," Majaj told the Jordan Times.

The U.S. was the only western country reported to have made such orders to its employees in Jordan; several Far Eastern countries including the Philippines, Indonesia, Taiwan and Australia have reportedly advised their nationals to leave the region.

A British Embassy spokesman Friday denied reports that similar orders were issued to its staff yet.

Because the new American orders were also issued in Sudan, Yemen and Mauritania — all of which are officially against the western intervention in the Gulf — observers and officials saw the travel advisory as a political statement against these countries' position rather than a precautionary measure against anti-American violence.

"This measure is not to punish Jordan in any way," Young said. "The security provided in Jordan for the past four months to American and other foreigners has been very effective. But with no solution to the Gulf crisis, anti-American incidents would probably happen. Security for its citizens is always of concern to Washington."

The Jordanian public has been a staunch supporter of Iraq since the deployment of the U.S.-led forces in the Gulf after Iraq's takeover of Kuwait on Aug. 2. Tens of thousands of Jordanians have signed their names as volunteers to fight alongside Iraq should attack be launched on the Arab country by the western forces, and some Palestinian organisations have vowed to hit American targets if Iraq was actually hit.

"It has become an established fact throughout Jordan's history that foreigners have always been safe from any violence no matter what the circumstances were," an official told the Jordan Times. "There is no reason to fear anti-foreign incidents because Jordanians are not violent by nature."

According to political observers and commentators here, if anti-American incidents were to take place should war be launched against Iraq, it would not just happen in the countries mentioned in the new American travel advisory, but in other Arab countries who officially support the U.S.-led military intervention in the Gulf.

"If Washington is truly worried about the safety of its citizens, it should be worried about them in all Arab countries, not just Jordan and Sudan, should the U.S. government launch aggression on Iraq," one observer said.

"The masses share the same angry and frustrated feelings about the American

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Chairman of the Board of Directors:
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Director General:
MOHAMMAD AMAD

Editor-in-Chief:
GEORGE S. HAWATMEH

Editorial and advertising offices:
Jordan Press Foundation,
University Road, P.O. Box 6710, Amman, Jordan.
Telephones: 667171/6, 670141-4
Telex: 21497 ALRAI JO
Facsimile: 661242

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View from Amman

Between Hafr Al Batin and Tel Aviv

By Kamel S. Abu Jaber

ISRAELI "Defence" Minister Moshe Arens proclaims to the world "...There is no need for new ideas..." on the Middle East. Armed with the latest and most sophisticated weapons of death that the American arsenal can produce, Mr. Arens' brain seems to have stopped functioning. One wonders whether the dinosaurs thought in the same manner. For a human mind to atrophy to this point is not only sad but dangerous as well, especially when this same man commands one of the most powerful and well-armed military machines in the world.

What is happening to the Israelis? Indeed what is happening to the Jews of the world who are constantly parading, especially in the Western world, their ancient culture, human heritage and the mission of civilisation?

Neither the American Arens nor the Pole Shamir seems to realise that the world, whether they like it or not, is changing. That, however adamant or belligerent they may be, they too have to change accordingly or perish. Unfortunately, their vision of the world around them does not concern them alone, but promises to engulf the entire region as well. What do you do with a people led by so visionless a leadership that has, for the past few decades, kept the world on the brink of war? A fundamentalist leadership constantly speaking in the Biblical terms of vengeance and smiting its enemies? A leadership that has combined the Samson and the Massada complexes in one sad suicidal stroke? A leadership that seems so impervious to the logic of humanity and yet sadly has come to capture the imagination and the heart of the Western world and to control its destiny?

As the year 1990 draws to an end, the Israeli newspaper Davar

publishes the results of a poll that shows the Israeli voter moving further to the right than ever before; towards more intransigence and belligerence. Forty years after its establishment, Israel remains a pariah in its region. The wandering Jew remains wandering and not because the Arabs refused peace but the other way around. The hardening of the arteries that is taking place in the Israeli body politic promises to produce similar results in the Palestinian and Arab body politic as well.

But then, Israel is not alone in its downward slide towards medieval thinking. In a place called Hafr Al Batin, somewhere in the timeless deserts of Arabia, a president called George Bush promises great violence — violence that may ultimately engulf the entire world. Here, too, few sane observers can decipher the mental processes that brought the American president, who otherwise seems to be a gentle person, who promised in his election campaign a kinder, gentler world, to dig his mental trenches so deep against meaningful dialogue genuinely leading towards peace.

What does Mr. Bush want? What does Mr. Shamir want? Why is it that in both cases both men seem to think that only through violent means can they reach their goals? How did they come to dehumanise the Arabs to the point where they think that the only language we understand is that of violence?

Are they asking and seeking coexistence with the Arab World or an over lordship?

Are they seeking peace or capitulation? And why is it that the affair has been reduced to a personal campaign against Mr. Yasser Arafat on the one hand and Mr. Saddam Hussein on the

other? And finally, what brought about this terrible partnership against the Arabs and why?

The two crises have already produced so many victims and so much bloodshed. The region between Hafr Al Batin and Tel Aviv is permeated with the odour of gun powder, napalm and blood. The armies on both sides promise to use the ugliest and deadliest weapons ever produced by man and here we sit in the middle hoping that somewhere, somehow, a peaceful thought, like a kind gentle breeze, will creep into the mind of these belligerent mentalities to make a change.

This Christmas season promises to be another sad one like the forty others that have preceded it since 1948. Margaret Thatcher and now Edward Shevardnadze are gone but the threat to the area has not abated. The Palestinian intifada is as strong as ever, an expression of the Palestinian will to keep the flame of resistance alive.

And so it comes to pass that we, Arabs, once again pray for peace in the midst of the chaos created for us and around us by a strange combination of forces. What ties Tel Aviv to Hafr Al Batin? But then what hold has Shamir over Bush? Hafr means digging and Al-Batin means the esoteric. What strange power causes the man in Washington to behave in such a strange inhuman way whenever the man from Tel Aviv pulls the string?

The year 1990 is the end of a decade and also the beginning of another as well as the ushering out of the last decade of the twentieth century. It is hoped that the men involved will see the wisdom in the words of the Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth: "Blessed are the peace makers."

Misguided priorities, scrambled outlooks

THERE ARE persistent reports that Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir wants to invite the opposition Labour Party of Shimon Peres to participate in a new coalition government. On the surface, such a development would cause some optimism that Tel Aviv is on the verge of announcing a peace initiative to resolve the Palestinian problem. Should that be the case, Israel would in effect be providing the necessary impetus for the resolution of the Gulf crisis as well.

It is a well known fact that a peaceful settlement of the Kuwaiti situation now hinges on broad assurances that the Palestinian question will be addressed by the U.N. Security Council on the basis of resolutions 242 and 338.

Yet the physical signs on the Israeli-Jordanian borders, suggest that Shamir's intentions are anything but peaceful. There are new deployments of Israeli troops along Jordan's armistice lines with Israel that suggest that in the event of a Gulf war the Israeli government may try to use Jordanian territory to launch a sneak attack against Iraq. Shamir is vying for an excuse to deal a devastating blow to Iraq in order to wipe out its military might as he has been a principal player behind the scenes to push for a war scenario with Baghdad. No wonder Iraqi President Saddam Hussein has placed Israel as his forces' top target should his country be attacked.

It is therefore no accident that Tel Aviv has been sending Jordan one warning after the other ostensibly against the use of Jordan's territory or air space by Iraq against Israel. In the face of these Israeli aggressive intentions against Jordan's territorial integrity and independence, Jordanians cannot but be determined to frustrate any plans by any side to use its territory in the event of armed hostilities breaking out.

Jordan's policy has been and continues to be to promote a peaceful resolution of the Kuwaiti conflict and is not prepared to be dragged into any unnecessary war in the Gulf region. Israel's policy, on the other hand, is to precipitate a major conflagration in the area for one singular objective, namely, to eliminate the existing Arab strategic strength that is reflected in Iraq's military prowess.

All Arabs know only too well that fighting in the Gulf, should it erupt, would be a war by proxy on behalf of Tel Aviv. Any Israeli acts of belligerence against Jordan must be interpreted therefore as part of the scenario where Israel is made to *win* in the area regardless.

Instead of preparing for war, Israel should be seeking peace. It will do itself a big favour if it works for averting war in the area.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

AL RA'I Arabic daily said Friday that the time has not run out yet for achieving a political settlement to the Gulf crisis, and stressed that the door for dialogue should remain open to pave the way for peace. The paper repeated Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's call for a dialogue, which the president insisted that it is the only way to attain the aspired peace, and said that peace is not beneficial for Iraq only but also for Western interests and those of the Gulf states. The paper said former Kuwaiti leaders' claim that it is too late for achieving a settlement is far from the truth, and seems to be directed towards aborting a new effort being exerted by Algerian President Chadli Benjedid to achieve a settlement in the Gulf with the help of the European nations. For the Gulf states and Kuwait's interest, peace is the only way for their survival and for the future generations; and therefore these states ought to take the initiative themselves and try to achieve a settlement, said the paper. The world community for its part, should not give the chance to the United States to launch aggression on Iraq under the Security Council's umbrella; and intensive efforts to reach peace are of paramount necessity at the moment, said the paper. It is a well known fact that the United States aims to abort all Arab attempts to help the Palestinians regain their rights and lands, and it is therefore aiming to destroy Iraq's military power to achieve that goal, the paper noted. Therefore, it said, it is incumbent upon the Arabs to find a way to settle the Gulf crisis peacefully and foil Washington's conspiracies.

A columnist in Al Ra'i Arabic daily criticises those parliament members who on Wednesday raised their voices to attack Jordan's information policies and the role of Jordan radio and television and the media in covering the recent events in the Gulf. Bader Abdul Haq says that those deputies who are not satisfied with the country's information service want to have things their own way to serve certain groups and to impose their own concepts about information and the media on the rest of the people of Jordan. These deputies believe that they represent all the people of the country and indeed they are the only citizens who can determine the informational and cultural policies for the Kingdom, says the writer. At the same time Wednesday's session saw moderate voices paying tribute to the information services and demanding further efforts to promote them in a way to conform to the democratisation process in Jordan, says Abdul Haq. Indeed, the information services and the media did a great job at a time when Jordan and the Arabs World at large were exposed to a brutal campaign on the part of the United States and its allies, with the result that Jordan's information services and the media have started to win the respect and appreciation of enemies and friends world wide, says the writer. He says gone are the days when Jordan's information services were directed by the whims of certain individuals in a manner to please a group of people or to serve self interests.

Shevardnadze plays Palace of Congresses finale

By Brian Friedman
The Associated Press

MOSCOW — The Kremlin's Palace of Congresses resembles a grand opera house, and Edward Shevardnadze's surprise resignation as foreign minister was latest drama of perestroika to play the palace.

The modernist parliament building, built in the early 1960s, for years echoed with the sonorous drone of endless, colourless speeches and monotonous debate that characterised the Brezhnev era.

But in recent years some lively things have taken place on the podium.

The Communist Party surrendered its leading role in the nation during a session at the palace this year — a little over a year ago Nobel laureate Andrei Sakharov, near his death, gave a speech warning of dictatorship.

In July, Boris Yeltsin, president of the Russian republic, lashed the Communist Party congress with the announcement

that he was quitting the party.

On Thursday, Shevardnadze took his bow, starting the Congress of People's Deputies by resigning as foreign minister, warning in an emotion-choked voice that "dictatorship is coming."

Shevardnadze began his address theatrically: Waving a prepared text in the air and then discarding it for what he called "the briefest and most difficult speech of my life" — a rambling 15-minute discourse that ended with him storming from the podium stage left.

As if it were intermission, the deputies then bounded out of their plush red seats and flooded the white marble foyer of the palace to offer their reviews of the performance and its meaning.

Latvian Deputy Nikolai Neyland said Shevardnadze had bowed to incessant criticism from hard-line deputies and others who alleged that the foreign minister was risking a repeat of Afghanistan by involving the

Soviet Union in the Gulf. But he said the real opposition went deeper.

"They weren't attacking Shevardnadze so much as our foreign policy," he said. "They have been using the Gulf as a pretext to express dissatisfaction that the Soviet Union has lost its super-power image, the Soviet Union has lost allies in Eastern Europe and we supposedly have made too many concessions on arms control."

Roy Medvedev, a deputy and historian, said Shevardnadze had shown "weakness" by caving in to criticism that Soviet leaders such as President Mikhail S. Gorbachev and embattled Prime Minister Nikolai I. Ryzhkov have endured for months.

"If all our leaders reacted to criticism this way, Ryzhkov would long ago have hung himself, Yeltsin would have shot himself, and I don't know what fate Gorbachev would have chosen," Medvedev said.

"It's a step in the right direction," said an almost gleeful Col. Viktor Alkmsis. He is the leader of the hard-line "Soyuz" faction in parliament and one of the two conservatives Shevardnadze had identified in the speech as the lawmakers "with colonels' stripes" who were persecuting him.

"It's a manoeuvre," offered the other, Col. Nikolai Petrushevskiy.

Before too long, Gorbachev aides began to circulate, speaking to deputies and journalists to try to limit the damage that Shevardnadze had caused.

The next act featured Gorbachev, who told the deputies he would not "overdramatize" and then played the betrayed friend, though his shock at Shevardnadze's announcement seemed genuine enough.

Rizoli Odzhiev, a hulking deputy from Tadzhikistan who lost a leg in Afghanistan, savoured the high drama as a welcome change from earlier years.

"I don't need to remind you what the scene was like in this hall 10 years ago," said Odzhiev.

Blackout leaves Iraqis in sombre mood

By Simon Martin
Reuters

BAGHDAD — An electronic message board on top of Baghdad's Mansour Melia Hotel, home to Western hostages till their release this month, reads "Merry Xmas, Happy 1991."

But the cheery message belies the real mood.

Blackouts, queues for rationed food, growing unemployment and media bombardment of advice on countering air raids have fostered sombre forebodings.

"I've already lost nine years of my life to the army," lamented a 33-year-old Iraqi, who served in the 1980-88 Gulf war against Iran.

Now, after just five months of civilian life, he's going back into uniform to face a different enemy — discarding a hard-won job and shelving his prospects for marriage.

Similar stories can be heard throughout Baghdad as

thousands of veterans of the Iran-Iraq war are called up to help retain Kuwait against the multinational force massed in Saudi Arabia.

Iraq has dismissed a U.N. deadline to quit Kuwait by Jan. 15 or face war.

Hundreds of thousands of Asian and Arab expatriate workers have fled since the Gulf crisis erupted on Aug. 2, leaving Iraqis to tackle some of the menial jobs they did.

With half a million troops in or near Kuwait, almost all Iraq's extended families have someone near the front lines.

Those over military age are at risk of being stopped on the street and ordered into the million-strong popular army militia.

Support for Iraq's occupation of Kuwait — and a possible war to keep it — is hard to assess in a city where many are reluctant to talk to reporters.

Iraqi leaders insist the people are 100 per cent behind Presi-

dent Saddam Hussein. Western diplomats variously describe the public mood as sombre, nervous, depressed or resigned.

"After 22 years of Baathism...the mood is one of resignation," said one diplomat.

"After so long they are no longer even disposed to try to challenge what the government does."

The diplomat said U.N. sanctions would not affect Iraq's military machine for another year. But so many human and material resources were being diverted to the army that there was nothing for other sectors.

With 23 days to the deadline and plans for U.S.-Iraqi talks deadlocked over dates, diplomats differ in predicting a scenario for a possible solution.

One thought Saddam might consider a partial withdrawal, despite vehement denials, but would insist on keeping Biyuni and Warbe islands, dominating his main sea outlet.

"As a crude oil outlet, half the

Shatt Al Arab is not enough. Iraq wants onshore loading to cope with expanded oil production. I think he will adamantly stick to this point but I don't know if the Americans can accept it," one diplomat said.

The Shatt Al Arab is shared with neighbouring Iran.

He said if war broke out, casualties on both sides would be enormous and Western public opinion would not stand them for long. "This is no joke...neither side can afford to flirt with the military option."

Another diplomat believed Saddam was aware of the dangers of war and would be able to stay in power even if he pulled out of Kuwait with little or nothing to show for it.

"If the Iraqis start winning a war, God knows what would happen. The Americans can't afford to lose. If casualties started to mount there would be no limit to what the Western forces would be prepared to use."

of violence," said Steve Blair, a lawyer who works for environmental causes. "We are an international team opposed to any form of aggression."

The British government Friday ordered the compulsory call-up of 390 army medical reservists for service in the Gulf after getting too few volunteers.

The move by Defence Secretary Tom King was the first time that Britain, which has an all-volunteer military force of regulars, has resorted to conscription for 25 years.

About 750 volunteers turned up at two reception centres in Scotland and England Thursday in response to a Defence Ministry call for between 1,000 and 1,500 volunteers for the Gulf.

A ministry statement said compulsory call-up notices will be sent out immediately and training will start within days.

Emigres

(Continued from page 1)

other immigrants could displace them in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Dinitz contended it was not government policy to direct Soviet Jews to the occupied territories. Only about 1,000 of those who arrived this year had settled across the old "green line" border, according to Dinitz.



Iran emerges victorious in all cases in Gulf

By Anwar Faruqi
Associated Press

TEHRAN — Iran is neutral in the Gulf crisis, but whatever the outcome it will have an impact on Iran's future in the region and beyond.

The crisis also will have a profound effect on President Hashemi Rafsanjani's efforts to steer Iran away from the legacy of the late revolutionary patriarch, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

Iraq was Iran's foe in the 1980-88 Gulf war. If Iraq emerges from the current crisis with its military power intact, Iran would be wooed by the countries of the region as a counterweight to Iraq's ambitions.

If Iraq is driven out of Kuwait and its military might destroyed or seriously weakened, Iran would be left in a powerful position that would make its Arab neighbours uneasy.

A victory for America and the international force and any continuation of a U.S. presence in the region might incense Iran's anti-Western radicals and create the possibility of new turbulence in the region.

Rafsanjani, leader of the country's so-called pragmatists, has largely pushed aside radical rivals in a political power struggle that surfaced following Khomeini's death in June 1989.

But the hard-liners, opposed to his drive to repair relations with the West and Iran's Arab neighbours, are seeking to undercut Rafsanjani by whipping up anti-American passions.

Some even want to align Iran with Iraq in a new Islamic front against "the great Satan."

"The Iranians are faced with a dilemma: They don't want the Iraqis to further tip the regional balance by coming out of this situation in possession of parts of Kuwait," said Philip Robins, an analyst with London's Royal Institute of International Studies.

"On the other hand, they are concerned about the buildup of Western forces, particularly the Americans, in the region," he noted in a telephone interview.

Shireen Hunter, an analyst with Washington's Institute of Strategic and International Studies, fears that war "could set back the process of moderation, consolidation and reconstruction going on in Iran now."

"If war erupts, and if it extends into Iraqi territory, the radicals are going to try to use the opportunity to undermine Rafsanjani's moderate policies," she said in a telephone interview with the Associated Press.

"A solution where Iraq is not destroyed but is left weakened is in Iran's best interests," Hunter noted.

Parliament speaker Mehdi Karubi, who has emerged as the foremost leader of the radicals, said: "I would not support a confrontation with the United States hand-in-hand with Iraq."

"But if it was a pan-Islamic thing, together with all the other Muslim countries, I'd support that," he said in an interview.

"The radical position is that if possible, the way should be paved for the humiliation of American forces in the Gulf," said Morteza Firozi, a senior commentator on the influential English-language Tehran Times daily.

Iran's 55 million people are Persians, not Arabs. But they are overwhelmingly Shiite Muslims and, despite the war with Iraq, feel kinship with fellow Shites who make up 55 per cent of Iraq's population.

A victory for America and the international force and any continuation of a U.S. presence in the region might incense Iran's anti-Western radicals and create the possibility of a new turbulence in the region.

Hunter said that if the Shites' holiest shrines in the Iraqi cities of Najaf, Karbala and Kazimain, all south of Baghdad, are damaged in any hostilities, "popular passions in Iran would really rise."

Iran has insisted Iraq withdraw from Kuwait. But Rafsanjani also has condemned the foreign forces sent to the Gulf region, which Iran considers its turf.

The Kuwait crisis has brought considerable gains for Rafsanjani, including as much as \$1 billion from oil price increases that boost his drive to rebuild the economy. The crisis has also led to improved relations with the West and the other Arab states and Iraqi acceptance of Tehran's conditions for formally ending the 1980-88 war.

Robins noted: "It would be highly unlikely that Iran will in any way become involved in a military conflict on either side." Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Mohammad Besharati said in an interview: "If there is a war, our policy is clear: we do not intend to join any forces in the Gulf or to help one side against another. Our policy is to seek a peaceful solution to the crisis."

Starting a new life

By Stephen Nisbet
Reuter

BRUSSELS — Paul, a Romanian interpreter, boasted casually of how he had fled to Belgium. Justice Ministry officials when claiming to be a refugee.

"I felt like starting a new life, so I came to Belgium and told them I had been beaten up by the 30s, referring to the street violence in Bucharest last June in which squads of miners attacked suspected government critics.

"But I'm not staying in Brussels. It's the most boring city in Europe. I'm off to Liege to get work," he said. The east Belgian city had the advantage of being near the Dutch and German frontiers should he need to disappear quickly.

People like Paul (not his real name) are giving European Community immigration authorities a headache as they contemplate a big influx of people from the former communist countries of Eastern Europe, coinciding with progress to the EC's frontier-free single market at the end of 1992.

The exodus could become a crisis if, as expected, the Soviet parliament passes a law in the next few weeks allowing its citizens to emigrate.

Soviet EC ambassador Vladimir Shemiatenkov said Moscow's labour experts expected two to three million Soviet citizens, from street sweepers to professional people, to head west in search of work.

The existing problem can be seen at Petit Chateau, a former army selection centre in a dingy, canal-side neighbourhood of central Brussels, where Paul and 12,000 other current applicants for refugee status have their first brushes with authority.

Each day before dawn, dozens of people from around the world queue up to put their cases, hoping to persuade interviewers that they face persecution at home — or at least to string out official inquiries so they can prolong their stay.

One man in the queue, a Sikh

from India, showed a discoloured foot which he said was the result of a police beating at home.

He said he had come to Europe on a cheap visa to Czechoslovakia, then paid \$500 to a taxi driver who brought him illegally to Belgium.

Belgian refugee commissioner Marc Bossuyt said only 17 per cent of applications succeeded and even then mostly because the applicant's story was given the benefit of the doubt.

Justice Minister Melchior Wathelet said the number of political asylum seekers was exploding throughout Europe and North America — from 25,000 in 1973 to an estimated 600,000 this year.

This trend, with 90 per cent of applications rejected, was putting at risk the very basis of the 1951 Geneva Convention for protecting genuine refugees, and also called into question general immigration policies. Wathelet said this month.

Romanians are the biggest single nationality among the 500 people crammed into Petit Chateau's dormitory living quarters. A thousand more would-be refugees are put up elsewhere in makeshift red cross accommodation.

Earlier this year, Poles were the most numerous group, and may become so again shortly when Germany allows them three-month visa-free entry.

Bonn's decision has annoyed others in the Schengen group, the community's six founding members, which have pledged to demolish their internal frontiers faster than the rest of the bloc.

Diplomats said Germany had effectively imposed the same policy on its Schengen partners — France, Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands — without consulting them first.

Once in Germany, a Pole could move easily elsewhere in the Schengen bloc.

A Polish diplomat in Brussels said the many Poles expected to take advantage of visa-free travel to Germany would include some intending to work in the West — although the conditions

of entry are supposed to exclude this.

In the EC's capital city, there is already a thriving black labour market provided by Polish and other illegal immigrants, for example in mental domestic and building jobs.

The Brussels newspaper Le Soir reported earlier this month a police raid on a slum flat occupied by 40 Polish squatters who were in Belgium illegally.

The newspaper, not noted for sensationalism, said Pimps found a supply of prostitutes at Petit Chateau among the Ghanaians who make up another large group which traditionally seeks — usually unsuccessfully — to obtain refugee status in Belgium.

Unsuccessful applicants for refugee status are seldom forced to return to where they came from, but go to another EC state or drift into an unofficial existence where they are ripe for exploitation by unscrupulous employers and landlords.

With warnings from Moscow of massive Soviet emigration to the West in the near future, Europe's immigration planners face a dilemma.

If they crack down too hard on Paul and others like him, they may punish some people who are genuinely as refugees and not simply economic migrants seeking a better material life.

They may also be tarred with the anti-immigration brush associated with far-right parties in some Western European states.

But if they are too lax, they risk seeing an ever-greater arrivals rate which could end up fanning popular support for xenophobic parties.

A Liberian waiting outside Petit Chateau in the hope of being offered illegal casual labour said he was grateful to Belgium for offering him sanctuary, but his feelings varied by the day.

"Sometimes people look at you on a tram as though you're inconveniencing them just by being there. But then yesterday, a man gave away his coat to my friend because he was cold," he said.

By Mimi Mann
The Associated Press

CAIRO — It took Suzanne Mubarak a year after her husband became president to decide what kind of first lady she wanted to be. Then she accepted the challenge of an American professor and went into the slums.

For eight years, she has worked among her country's poor to bring education and hope to impoverished children. Mrs. Mubarak describes herself as a "hands-on social worker."

She has done the job largely without fanfare, opening schools and small libraries, obtaining medical supplies and hospitals for those without them. Much of her attention is focused on eradicating illiteracy, which affects more than half the 55 million Egyptians.

"I go to the most depressed area, the most depressed school, the most depressed hospital," she said, "but I don't get depressed. When I see what's been done, the smiles of the children, if you can solve the worst case, surely the rest will follow."

Mrs. Mubarak calls her slum projects "self-help." People who are inspired to help themselves are filled with pride and go on from there," she said. "You don't feel like keeping a place clean if its walls are falling in."

Seated on the lawn of Araba Palace, a presidential guest house, she spoke of her goals for Egypt and her life as first lady, wife and mother of two grown sons. Politics was the only subject declared off limits for her first lengthy interview since 1985.

"People say I'm shy, but I don't think so," she said. "I would say I'm just a bit timid."

To the outside world, and most

Egypt's first woman is a 'hands-on social worker'

Egyptians. Mrs. Mubarak is a

She is not a daydreamer. Cairo's government newspaper. Her activities were said in many

reported because she is not husband. President Hosni Mubarak, wanted a first lady.

The president was said to be anxious that his wife not become a figurehead among the

Two Egyptians as the flamboyant than Sadat had done. Mrs. Mubarak often was compared with her predecessor.

They have addressed many of the same problems, relating to the state of women, education, overpopulation and poverty.

"We're both Egyptians, so if we do things differently, it's a matter of style," Mrs. Mubarak said. "The problems we've tried

to solve are still with us."

"I can't work in big crowds, in the limelight," she said. "When I cut a ribbon at a school, I've been there 20 times before, improving the building, buying the books, training the teachers, talking with the children and visiting parents in their homes. It's a project I created with the help of private donations."

When her husband became president in 1981 after Sadat's assassination, "it took me one full year to find in myself what was right for me as first lady," Mrs. Mubarak said.

Suzanne Thabet, daughter of an Egyptian doctor and a Welsh nurse, was 17 when she married Capt. Hosni Mubarak, an air force flight instructor.

"He was so handsome," said Mrs. Mubarak. "He still is."

For 10 years, she kept to the traditional role of housewife and mother to sons Ala and Gamal.

"It was very difficult, because there were so many wars," she said. "My husband was always gone. I gave my life to the boys."

The day came when both were in school, and Mrs. Mubarak asked herself "what do I do now?"

Relatives and friends counseled cooking or sewing classes, but "I hate those things," she said. She enrolled in American University in Cairo. In 1977, when her husband was vice president, she graduated in political science with a minor in psychology. She earned a Master's in sociology in 1982.

The first lady and her women volunteers now care for 15 schools and expect to add more.

Some of Egypt's problems are so huge that one person cannot solve them, she said, but being first lady lets her try and rewards her when she succeeds.



"I go to the most depressed area, the most depressed school, the most depressed hospital, but I don't get depressed"

Christmas in a refugee camp

By George Jahn
The Associated Press

TRAISKIRCHEN, Austria — The Magola and Pasca families are celebrating Christmas this year in a dingy refugee camp, far from friends and family. They wouldn't want it any other way.

"I'd rather die than go back," Mariana Adriana Pasca said, when asked if she would miss traditional festivities in her former home of Sibiu, Romania. Her twin sister and 7-year-old son nodded their assent.

On another floor of the drab concrete structure housing many of the 1,000 refugees of the Traiskirchen camp, other voices express similar sentiments. The camp, about 50 kilometres south of Vienna, is first home to many Eastern European fleeing poverty and turmoil in their homelands.

Forgetting the past

"I want to forget my past," Natalia Magola said of Christmas in Lvov, the Western Ukrainian city of Crumbling Majesty she and her mother left behind. "I want to think only of the future."

As she spoke, a wail left alone by her mother wailed in the neighbouring room. Children rode bikes up and down the stone-floored hallway, darkened to save energy. In the winter gloom outside, the wind whipped drizzle against the jumble of peeling 19th century buildings and ugly cement dormitories.

The Traiskirchen camp was first used for refugees fleeing the violent suppression of Hungary's revolt against communism in 1956. Thousands fleeing the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have passed through it since. The Austrian government picks up its costs.

Miss Magola appeared comfortable with the sordid surroundings as she and her 19-year-old mother, Sofia, sat on their camp cot, occasionally coddling the stray cat they had adopted.

Past fears and present anxieties faded as the 21-year-old fashion designer spoke basely of the future.

A movie star

"I'd like to go to the United States or maybe Canada," Miss Magola said. "I'm a good dancer. Maybe I can make videos

and become a movie star."

Her mother's aspirations were even simpler.

"I will be happy when my daughter is happy," she said with a smile.

The slow thaw in the Soviet Union did not satisfy the Magolas, fervent Greek Catholics whose religion is struggling to re-establish itself in the Western Ukraine after decades of brutal suppression.

They arrived in Traiskirchen May 13 after jumping the train that was supposed to take them to Yugoslavia for a vacation. Now they wait for Austria to formally recognise them as refugees and hope for a new life in North America.

Greek Catholics celebrate Christmas Jan. 6, and Christmas last year held special memories for the younger Magola woman.

Her father died shortly afterward, and she has little hope that she will soon see most of the 12 other family members who gathered at their home for the festivities.

"We sat down at the table, and all of the family made the sign of the cross," she related, her eyes aglow. "Then we had our traditional meal of vegetables and buckwheat, and we prayed and sang religious songs."

"It won't be the same this year with father gone and the relatives so far away," she said, speaking in accented English.

"But my brother and his wife are going to visit, we're going to have a small tree, and we have one big present we didn't have last year — freedom."

The Pascas, too, appreciate freedom and realise how tenuous it is.

Mrs. Pasca dropped her son Achim off with an aunt just before Christmas last year, then joined her sister Gabriela Daniela in a street protest against Communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu.

Demonstrations nationwide led to the revolution that toppled the Ceausescu regime and the dictator's execution Dec. 25.

The Pascas rejoiced along with the rest of the nation, believing that Ceausescu's demise meant the end of years of privation and repression. Their joy was short lived.

"We thought the future looked bright after Ceausescu," Mrs. Pasca said. "We thought we would have lots to eat. Now the situation is catastrophic at home."

The 33-year-old divorcee and her sister, a gym teacher, came to Austria in February, fleeing

what they said was post-revolutionary chaos and the growing conviction that nothing had changed at home.

Mrs. Pasca's sister said she believes that Ceausescu's feared Securitate secret police are still in power. Calls home indicate that the shortage of basic consumer items has not subsided, she said.

The Pasca family has been turned down once by Austria for immigrant status and is appealing. A bitter controversy broke out in Austria last month over plans to send 7,000 Romanians back home, and officials now are trying to find places for them.

Destitution under Ceausescu clouded the memory of past Christmas for the Pascas and make this year's holiday season bright in comparison.

"I got presents in school today," Achim said proudly, brandishing a foil-covered chocolate Santa Claus and a bag full of sweets.

"Such things never happened in Romania," his mother said. "We often had a hard time finding enough to eat at Christmas, and whoever heard of children getting gifts at school?"

"We don't know what the future holds, but it's bound to be better than the past."

Terror

(Continued from page 1)

murderers were welcomed, as heroes, the inevitable result is that more people want to be considered as heroes," he said.

In the occupied territories, Palestinians observed a general strike called by underground leaders to protest the mass immigration of Soviet Jews and the increasing settlement of Jews in Arab Jerusalem.

A Palestinian shot by Israeli troops in 1988 died of his wounds Thursday, hospital officials said.

Khalid Khader Mahmoud, 30, had been paralysed since he was wounded by a bullet in his spine. He received treatment in Jordan but returned to the occupied West Bank Wednesday.

Israeli troops shot and wounded nine Palestinians during clashes in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip Thursday, Israeli television said.

The army rounded up more activists of the Muslim fundamentalist movement Hamas in a crackdown which began two weeks ago when Hamas claimed responsibility for stabbing to

death three Israelis in Tel Aviv.

Four Hamas fundamentalists appealed to Israel's supreme court Thursday to overturn an army order to expel them from the occupied Gaza Strip.

The expulsion order appealed Thursday was condemned by the U.N. Security Council last week in a resolution that also urged more protection for the Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza.

Missile

(Continued from page 1)

multinational forces if war breaks out, military analysts say.

Military analysts in Baghdad said Iraq was being training regular army commandos and volunteers from the the popular army in special operations against allied forces in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf.

The analysts said the training includes suicidal missions by sea and airborne operations.

A senior Baath party official said Thursday that thousands of volunteers had finished courses at a military camp in Najaf where they received special training on weapons and com-

mando tactics.

Abdul Rahim Abdul Qadder told the Al Jouhouriya newspaper that 138,700 volunteers have been trained in special operations in the camp, some 150 kilometres south of Baghdad.

"The Najaf camp is ideal in training combatants who symbolise heroism and discipline," he told the daily.

The analysts said the volunteers are probably receiving training in commando missions to be launched behind the lines of the multinational forces.

The Baath Party said Friday that millions of poor and oppressed Arab and Muslims would rise up alongside Baghdad in any war against foreign troops.

The Baath Party daily Al Thawra said in an editorial that U.S. President George Bush was boasting like a "peacock" about the armies he had massed against Iraq.

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Economy

Deepening U.S. recession nudges manufacturing sector into depression

WASHINGTON (R) — Orders for expensive manufactured goods plunged a record 10.5 per cent in November, the Commerce Department said Thursday, showing that as the U.S. economy slides deeper into recession, manufacturing seems closer to a depression.

The unexpectedly severe decline in orders for durable goods matched a record drop in January this year, the biggest since record-keeping began in 1958.

Transport industries suffered the most, but no U.S. industry was spared. Every manufacturing sector — from defence to computers — had less business in November than in October.

"Manufacturing is now in a deep recession. It was getting worse in the fourth quarter. There is no end in sight," said Allen Sinai, chief economist for Boston Co. in New York.

Durable goods, items like cars and refrigerators meant to last three years or more, are the backbone of domestic manufacturing and closely monitored as a measure of the economy's health.

Faced with an official recession after eight years of growth, the nation's central bank, the Federal Reserve, has been pushing down interest rates.

But in a report Thursday, the head of the joint economic committee of Congress said the lower interest rates were merely a

beginning and must fall further to combat the economic slump effectively.

The plummeting orders in November surprised Wall Street economists, none of whom had anticipated such a severe drop.

The decline was more than triple the 3.1 per cent loss economists had forecast.

By comparison, orders rose 3.6 per cent in October.

Some unique factors did affect the November report, particularly a 27.4 per cent skid in transport orders that reflected sharp production cutbacks in the final three months of this year. Transport orders rose 14.1 per cent in October.

And new aircraft orders were down 38.8 per cent from October, when leading manufacturer Boeing Co. received a flood of multi-billion dollar orders.

But even excluding transport items, durable goods orders fell 3.5 per cent last month after declining 0.2 per cent in October.

"It seems we are developing all the classic signs of recession — weakness at the consumer level, weakness at the production level and signs that the two are starting to influence one another," said Robert Dederick, senior economist at Northern Trust Co. in Chicago.

Vital consumer buying power was sapped in November, when 300,000 jobs were lost in manufacturing industries. Consumer buying fuels two-thirds of the nation's economic growth.

The total value of new orders last month was the lowest in 1½ years at \$115.9 billion.

Given the surprisingly severe order drop, Sinai said he was revising downwards his prediction for the nation's gross national product (GNP).

He had expected the GNP to contract for the final quarter of the year at an annual rate of three to four per cent. But now, he said, "five per cent is not out of bounds, the way the economy is sliding."

Tokyo stocks end year lower, tumbling 38.7 per cent in 1990

TOKYO (R) — In a grim reminder of one of the Tokyo stock market's worst years ever, share prices ended 1990 the way they began — lower.

Friday's fall brought the total decline in the key Nikkei stock average over the year to nearly 40 per cent.

"The realisation that this year was a bad one all came out in the end," said Masahiko Tsuyuzaki, a trader at Tachibana Securities Co. Ltd.

The Nikkei stock average fell 91.99 points, or 0.36 per cent, to 23,848.71 at midday Friday, the end of the last session for the year.

The market will reopen for another half-day session Jan. 4 before normal trading resumes Jan. 7.

It was the first time the Nikkei failed to end the year higher since 1986, and the decline bet-traded brokers' fragile hopes that the average would close above

24,000 points to provide a psychological boost for next year.

"When people saw the Nikkei wasn't going to close above 24,000, they sold," Tachibana's Tsuyuzaki said.

Friday's decline brought the Nikkei's total fall for 1990 to 15,067.16 points, or 38.7 per cent. That was the biggest yearly percentage drop since World War II, said Kunio Urakami, a senior adviser at Nikko Securities Investment Trust and Management Co. Ltd.

"There aren't any bright factors in 1991 either," he said.

The market has suffered from high interest rates, sluggish corporate profit growth, high oil prices in a country that imports virtually all its oil, jitters over the Gulf crisis, and concern over politics in the Soviet Union.

Friday's close contrasts sharply with 1989, when the Nikkei finished at a record 38,915.87,

up 29 per cent over the year.

While the immediate economic impact of the year's downward stock price spiral appears to have been slight, the falls have tarnished the image of a market which some believed could only go up.

"The crash/crumble of 1990 marked the end of an era, indeed the end of a whole investment culture," analyst Peter Tasker at Kleinwort Benson International Inc. said in a report.

That culture centred around fringe speculation groups, "churn-and-burn" tokkin (special money trusts) accounts, glibble individuals, booming investment trusts that consistently underperformed and warrant investors, he said.

"Putting humpty-dumpty together again will prove a long and arduous process," Tasker said in his report.

Now Tokyo's often superstitious brokers are anxiously wait-

ing to see how the market fares when it reopens Jan. 4. Traditional wisdom holds that as the first day goes, so goes the rest of the year.

But few brokers or investors are overly optimistic about 1991.

"Today is a hint about next year. The market will move in a narrow range," said trader Toranobu Sugai at Lehman Brothers Japan Ltd., adding that the Nikkei is likely to end 1991 around where it is now.

An investor poll carried recently in a local stock paper forecast a 1991 high for the Nikkei of 28,000 to 30,000 points and a low of 21,000 to 22,000.

In the 12-year oriental astrological calendar, 1990 was the year of the horse, the year that ended the longest bull run in post-war history. Next year will be the year of the sheep.

"The sheep is quiet, so the market should be quiet too," an analyst said.

AMMAN EXCHANGE RATES

Thursday, December 27, 1990

Central Bank official rates

U.S. dollar	665.0	669.0	Japanese yen (for 100)	486.5	489.4
Pound Sterling	1248.5	1256.0	Dutch guilder	363.6	365.9
Deutschmark	432.6	435.2	Swedish crown	116.4	117.1
Swiss franc	507.4	510.4	Italian lira (for 100)	57.5	57.8
French franc	127.6	128.4	Belgian franc (for 10)	208.5	209.8

LONDON EXCHANGE RATES

LONDON (R) — Following are the buying and selling rates for leading world currencies and gold against the dollar at mid-session on the London foreign exchange and bullion markets Friday.

One Sterling	1.8975/85	U.S. dollar	
One U.S. dollar	1.1602/12	Canadian dollar	
	1.5180/90	Deutsche mark	
	1.7140/50	Dutch guilders	
	1.2950/65	Swiss francs	
	31.35/40	Belgian francs	
	5.1600/700	French francs	
	1144/1146	Italian lire	
	135.65/75	Japanese yen	
	5.6875/975	Swedish crowns	
	5.9475/575	Norwegian crowns	
	5.8850/650	Danish crowns	
One ounce of gold	385.00/385.50	U.S. dollars	

WORLD STOCK MARKETS

SYDNEY — Hopes for a year-end rally evaporated as fund managers deserted Australian shares ahead of the new year break. The All Ordinaries finished the last session of 1990 down 0.9 points at 1,279.8.

HONG KONG — The Seng index sagged 12.98 points to 9,053.73.

FRANKFURT — Uncertainties surrounding the Gulf and Soviet Union weighed on prices of German shares which ended a volatile year on a weak note. The DAX index fell 12.64 points to 1,398.23.

ZURICH — In light trade, Swiss shares closed narrowly mixed. The SPI index rose 1.7 points to 908.3.

PARIS — Afternoon buying by institutional investors lifted French shares above the day's lows but prices still closed weaker over the day. The CAC-40 index closed 10.97 points, or 0.72 per cent, down at 1,517.93.

LONDON — Shares drifted lower in late trade but volumes were very thin with many traders absent on holiday. By 1602 GMT the FTSE index was down 7.0 at 2,160.8.

NEW YORK — U.S. stocks were under tight pressure in quiet trade. The Dow Jones industrial average was off about three to 2,633.

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Kuwaitis give China new loan

BEIJING (R) — Kuwait has offered China a loan of 8.7 million Kuwaiti dinar (\$30 million) to finance construction of an aluminium foil plant, the ministry of foreign economic relations and trade (MOFERT) said Friday.

The soft loan was denominated in Kuwaiti dinar and would be paid in a currency of Kuwait's choice, a spokesman for the MOFERT loans administration bureau said.

The agreement was signed Thursday during a visit by Kuwaiti Emir Jaber Al Ahmad Al Sabah.

The plant would be put out to international tender for technology and equipment and paid for by Kuwait. It will produce 6,000 tonnes of aluminium foil plant, the ministry of foreign economic relations and trade (MOFERT) said Friday.

Kuwait has provided China with loans amounting to 88.6 million dinars (\$300 million) since 1982, MOFERT said.

Honduras to start fuel saving plan next month

TEGUCIGALPA (R) — Honduras will enact emergency fuel-saving measures to offset the impact of possible war in the Gulf and a new round of soaring oil prices, President Rafael Callejas said Thursday.

"I have given instructions to the economy ministry that from Jan. 1 they put into practice an emergency plan anticipating conflict in the Gulf," Callejas said.

He told reporters the plan would radically cut fuel consumption.

In October Honduras, one of the Western hemisphere's poorest nations, was forced to raise fuel prices by an average 112 per cent.

Callejas said if war broke out oil prices could climb to \$80 to \$100 a barrel.

"We wouldn't have the capacity to buy petrol," he said, adding that this would virtually paralyse the economy.

Gorbachev's economic adviser favours dual currency system

MOSCOW (R) — President Mikhail Gorbachev's personal economic adviser said Thursday he favoured the creation of a convertible Soviet rouble to co-exist with the present non-convertible currency.

Nikolai Petrakov told the newspaper Trud that extreme measures were required to revive the Soviet economy.

"We must get down to the task of improving the economy, above all monetary reform," he said.

He said the country should introduce a parallel rouble which could be freely exchanged for foreign currencies and used to buy various goods.

Supplies of the new "hard rouble" would be strictly limited and depend on available goods and foreign currency reserves.

"Therefore initially, the new money would be issued in a very limited quantity," Petrakov said.

The Soviet rouble has become increasingly worthless as earnings have outstripped productivity. The amount of paper money in circulation not backed by commodities has risen steadily. Inflation has eroded its value

and many goods and services are only available for Western currencies.

In a flourishing barter economy, food supplies to cities have been disrupted as farmers exchange grain for cement and other goods. Packets of Western cigarettes are frequently used as an alternative currency.

Petrakov said people should receive a part of their salaries or pensions in hard roubles and the amount would increase gradually in line with the availability of goods.

"Of course, distribution of essential goods would be controlled by the state and prices for them in the old money would remain the same," he said.

He said many goods would have two prices. "For example, a small car might cost 6,000 new roubles or, let us say, 30,000 to 40,000 old roubles (the present black market price)."

The rouble has three published exchange rates: The official rate of about 0.55 to the dollar, the commercial rate 1.66 to the dollar and tourist rate of

5.5 to the dollar. But on the black market the dollar sells for 20 roubles or more.

"Introduction of a hard rouble would give a powerful push to economic recovery. It would be a stimulus for boosting production and earning money — you will be able to buy something with it," Petrakov said.

He also praised the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a study on the Soviet economy and said economic recovery would be very difficult without foreign help.

The IMF and other multilateral aid agencies, in a report for the Group of Seven leading industrial nations, recommended an acceleration in market-oriented reforms including moves to make the rouble convertible.

"I think that, having got to know our projects, the IMF would grant us the necessary hard currency means to introduce a hard rouble," Petrakov said.

He did not say how much help was required.

Brazilian inflation hits 1,795%

RIO DE JANEIRO (R) — Brazilian consumer prices surged 1,795 per cent in 1990, outpacing last year's rate of 1,765 per cent, the government has reported.

The acceleration occurred despite President Fernando Collor de Mello's pledge to halt inflation within a year of taking office in March. He introduced tough anti-inflation measures that have thrown the economy into a recession.

Just before Collor assumed his post, Brazil experienced its worst inflation in history, with prices rising more than 60 per cent a month.

In December, prices were up 18.3 per cent, the highest monthly increase since Collor took office. Prices rose 15.6 per cent in November.

Faced with mounting criticism, Collor has defended his economic programme, arguing that he has managed to bring down monthly inflation.

Granada reports 27% fall in profit

LONDON (R) — Granada Group PLC, the British television and leisure company which produced such classic series as Brideshead Revisited and still makes the long-running soap opera Coronation Street, has said its profits had been hard hit by Britain's current economic downturn.

It reported a 27 per cent decline in annual pre-tax profits to £121 million (£235 million). Turnover was also down to £1.39 billion (£2.7 billion) in the year ended Sept. 29 from £1.64 billion (£3.2 billion) in the previous 12 months.

Granada said the recession in the advertising industry had squeezed margins at its subsid-

ary. Granada Television, which this month is celebrating 30 years of making "Coronation Street".

Profits were also affected by internal difficulties in its computer services division and market problems in overseas television rental.

"Despite the difficult condi-

tions, most of our businesses performed well in relation to their competitors," group chairman Alex Bernstein said.

But he added: "It is clear that 1991 will be a year of continued economic difficulties and a cautious approach to investment and tight control of cash remains necessary."

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Shekhar, Sikh leader to discuss Punjab

India moves soldiers into Kashmir capital

SRINAGAR (R) — Several hundred Indian soldiers were sent into the streets of Srinagar Friday and a curfew was imposed to halt demonstrations called by Kashmiri militants fighting to be rid of Indian rule.

Officials said similar round-the-clock curfews were imposed on most other towns in the Kashmir Valley, the centre of a year-old rebellion against India.

The streets of Srinagar, summer capital of India's only Muslim-majority state, were deserted and police reported little trouble, saying heavy morning rain helped the security forces.

They reported only one death, that of a young suspected militant shot while fleeing house-to-house searches by soldiers and paramilitary police. Police said an AK-47 assault rifle was found near his body.

The curfew was imposed Friday morning after two outlawed militant groups called on people to take to the streets in protest against what they alleged was torture of prisoners by security forces.

Allegations of torture and arbitrary killings of suspects later reported as deaths during encounters with militants are rife in the Kashmir Valley.

The valley's hereditary chief priest, Mirwaiz Omar Farooq,

telephoned a statement of protest to Srinagar reporters condemning the curfew, which prevented Muslims praying on the Islamic holy day.

About 2,000 people have been killed in the uprising this year in a campaign that has virtually halted the economy of the valley, which is largely dependent on tourism.

Meanwhile, Chandra Shekhar, India's prime minister for just seven weeks, scheduled talks with powerful Sikh leader Simranjit Singh Mann Friday in hopes of finding a way to end a decade-old separatist campaign in Punjab.

The talks, the first between an Indian leader and a single Sikh representative in more than five years, were set for Friday evening, Mann spokesman Maninderjit Singh told Reuters.

He said Mann had finally received a letter from Shekhar inviting him for talks. Mann had refused to meet the Indian leader without an official invitation.

Singh said Mann's mandate from fellow Sikh leaders was "self-determination" for the Sikhs, who are a majority in the rich agricultural northern state where militants are waging a campaign for an independent homeland they call Khalistan (land of the pure).

Self-determination could mean either independence or greater autonomy and Mann wanted a referendum in Punjab on the issue, Singh said.

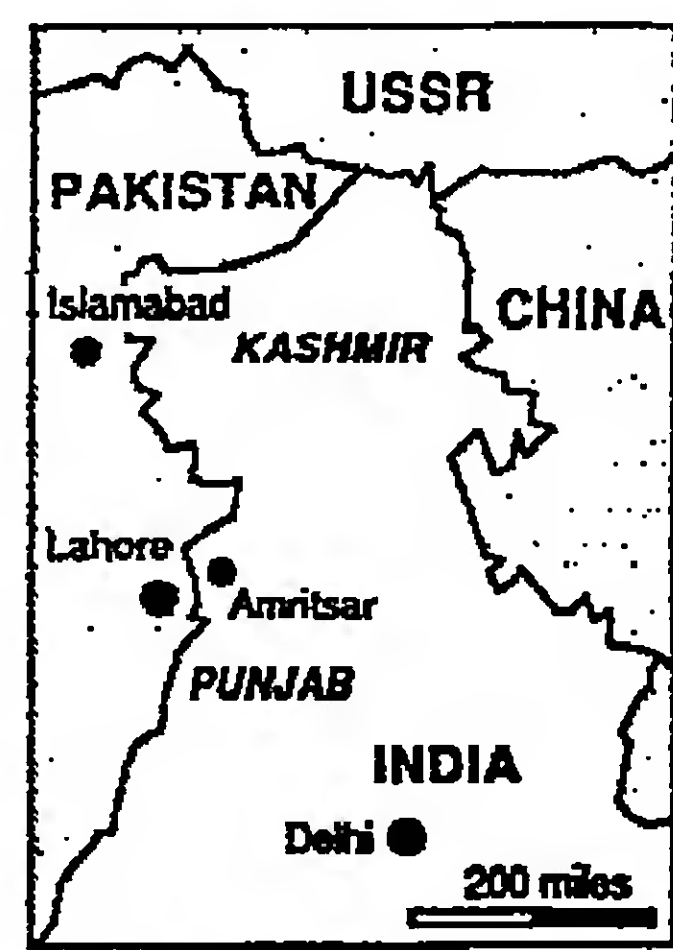
Both sides were uncertain about what might come out of the talks. "We're all guessing," said Singh. Official spokesmen had no comment.

There was little optimism in the press. "There have been so many false starts during efforts to solve the Punjab problem that few people will entertain any high hopes about the proposed talks," The Statesman newspaper said in an editorial.

Mann, a former senior policeman, and Shekhar are to meet at the end of one of the bloodiest years in Punjab, where police have reported more than 3,800 deaths in the militant campaign, more than double the official toll for last year.

The only serious note of optimism came from The Tribune newspaper, which said the Punjab capital Chandigarh.

"That such a meeting is taking place at all is a phenomenal achievement indicating a qualitative improvement in the situation," it said in an editorial. The talks were made possible by a meeting of all factions of the Sikh Akali Dal Party Wednesday that empowered Mann to hold talks with Shekhar.



day that empowered Mann to hold talks with Shekhar.

Their use of the phrase "self-determination" rather than independence lent some hope that there was room for negotiation. "If there is a glimmer of hope, it is the fact that the concept of a solution within a constitutional framework has evidently been accepted," said the Times of India.

Mann became the most powerful Sikh voice in November, 1989, when his supporters won nine out of Punjab's 13 parliamentary seats in general elections.

He won his own seat from a jail cell, where he had been confined for more than five years without charges, accused of helping plan the assassination of Indira Gandhi.

Mann is widely regarded as close to the militant leadership, which has created new chaos in Punjab in recent weeks by insisting all government work be done in Punjabi rather than Hindi or English.

China removes minister of police

PEKING (R) — Chinese Premier Li Peng removed his minister for public security Friday and diplomats said his departure seemed linked with the failure of police to control student protests and catch political fugitives last year.

Wang Fang, 70, had also failed to stop a rising wave of crime which has led to thousands of executions.

The official New China News Agency said Wang was replaced by 55-year-old Tao Sijun, a vice minister of public security who joined the Communist Party at the age of 14.

Wang submitted his resignation and Premier Li proposed the changes to the standing committee of China's parliament which approved them, the agency said. It gave no reasons.

Diplomats said Wang had effectively been out of office since last March because of ill health and political reasons. The main cause of his dismissal seemed to be the inability of his forces to stop waves of students marching from their campuses to Tiananmen Square in April of last year.

"He did not cover himself with glory. In the interests of stability they waited a while before dismissing him," a Western diplomat said.

But, diplomats added, it was the obvious split in the party leadership which allowed the protests to gather momentum.

Even after the army crushed the demonstrations in June, 1989, prominent dissidents and student leaders such as Chai Ling and Wenjiabao fled the country to form opposition groups in exile. "This was severely embarrassing," another diplomat said.

Wang's dismissal follows the sacking last February of the four top leaders of the powerful People's Armed Police, a separate force from the Public Security Ministry.

Wang, who took office in 1987, was generally regarded as a hardliner. But he also had close ties to Zhao Ziyang, the reformist party leader who was removed after the 1989 crackdown.

Under Wang's tenure, China witnessed a soaring crime rate. What officials described as a "serious smashing campaign" launched this year resulted in the executions of hundreds, possibly thousands of people.

The human rights organisation Amnesty International said in September that the 1,100 people it knew had been sentenced to death over the previous 12 months were the "tip of the iceberg."

Wang's predecessor, Ruan Chongwu, was dismissed after an earlier wave of student protest demonstrations.

The New China News Agency reported that 66-year-old Zheng Tuobin was replaced as foreign trade minister after five years in office by Li Langxing, 58, formerly his vice minister and a Russian and English speaker.

IRA ends Christmas truce; leader urges peace steps

DUBLIN (R) — As the IRA ended a Christmas truce, the leader of its political wing called on Britain and Ireland to take the next step towards peace in Northern Ireland.

Just 20 minutes after a short-lived ceasefire expired Thursday, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) resumed its guerrilla campaign with a gun attack on British soldiers at a border checkpoint. Nobody was hurt.

Then two policemen were slightly injured by a bomb thrown at a Belfast police station.

Irish Prime Minister Charles Haughey and Britain's Northern Ireland Minister Peter Brooke had both warmly welcomed the IRA's three-day truce, the first it had declared publicly since 1974, as a possible glimmer of hope for the future.

Gerry Adams, president of the IRA's political wing, conceded in a statement released Thursday that Brooke and Haughey had responded in a "positive" way to the ceasefire.

He called them "main players" in a conflict that has taken almost 3,000 lives in 21 years and said: "They can move the situation on and have the real responsibility to do so."

"There is an urgent need to develop an agenda which will bring about a total demilitarisation and usher in an era of lasting peace," he added.

But moderate nationalist leaders in Northern Ireland were bitterly disappointed by the quick resumption of IRA attacks. The last official ceasefire 16 years ago lasted eight months, ending only when talks failed to get off the ground.

19 killed in continued Sri Lankan fighting

COLOMBO (AP) — Tamil Tiger rebels ambushed soldiers clearing land mines Friday in eastern Sri Lanka, killing at least 10 people, military officials said.

The dead included five soldiers, one policeman and four Sinhalese civilians, said the officials, who cannot be identified under briefing rules.

The ambush took place at 7:30 a.m. (0200 GMT) in Bakmityyawa village when the soldiers were busy with the daily task of checking roads for land mines and booby traps, the officials said.

Details of the attack were not immediately available from the remote village in Ampara district, 200 kilometres east of Colombo.

Elsewhere, nine rebels were killed Thursday in separate battles with government troops in northern and eastern Sri Lanka, military officials said.

Two militants swallowed cyanide pills after being injured in fighting in the eastern town of Pottuvil and a third died of bullet wounds, the officials, who cannot be identified under briefing rules, said. Pottuvil is 220 kilometres east of Colombo.

Three militants were killed in two separate incidents in the north and the east, the officials said without giving details.

They said three more guerrillas were killed in Elephant Pass near a military camp that has been under attack since Sunday.

Bangladesh politicians agree not to trade abuse

DHAKA (R) — Bangladesh's normally vociferous politicians have agreed not to trade abuse in the run up to Feb. 27 parliamentary elections.

"The decision to refrain from making provocative remarks so that the elections can be held peacefully was reached at a meeting of three political alliances," a senior political leader said Friday.

He said the meeting Thursday night, headed by Mir Shawkat Ali, Dhaka branch leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), urged political workers "to remain respectful to democratic behaviours and avoid pasting posters of one party on that of another."

The meeting followed reports that BNP chief Begum Khaleda Zia and her main rival for power, Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina, had made scurrilous references to each other at recent election rallies.

"We must maintain unity and understanding for peaceful holding of the election with a spirit that binds us together in forcing former President Hussain Mohammad Ershad from nearly nine years of autocratic power," one leader told reporters.

Ershad, a former general who seized power in a 1982 military

coup, resigned and handed over power to Acting President Shabuddin Ahmad on Dec. 6 after a violent campaign by opposition parties, students and others.

Ershad, now in detention in a private villa, was formally charged Thursday with abuse of power and corruption.

Ahmad, a former chief justice, said after taking office that his main job was to hold free and impartial elections to restore democracy in this South Asian country of 110 million of the world's poorest people.

He had ordered a two-week amnesty, which expired Wednesday, for illegal arms to be surrendered. Those who failed to surrender their arms faced penalties of up to life imprisonment, he said.

Police seized a number of illegal arms from the home of Ershad last week.

But they said only about 100 arms and a small quantity of ammunition had been surrendered within the amnesty deadline.

However, the Interior Ministry said in a statement Thursday night that more than 500 firearms had been seized in raids during the two-week period.

Former Romanian king wants to return

GENEVA (R) — Former King Michael of Romania, undaunted by expulsion from his native land, said Friday he wants to return to Romania as a free citizen and would like to become its constitutional monarch once more.

Michael, 69, was kicked out of Romania Wednesday only 12 hours after he had arrived on a private Christmas trip to visit his ancestors' graves.

The former monarch, who has been living in exile since the Communists forced him from the throne in 1947, charged in a statement distributed by his press office that the authorities had flagrantly violated his human rights during this week's

visit. But his statement added: "This new obstruction will not be able to change the unalterable desire of His Majesty King Michael to enter in a trip as a free citizen of this country, without any constraint."

Michael has criticised Romania's leaders as being former Communists, little changed from dictator Nicolae Ceausescu whom they overthrew a year ago.

The government had also prevented him from making an earlier visit last April, saying it was too close to national elections in May, but had said he would be free to visit after the polls.

Michael stated that he had made it clear to the Romanian authorities before travelling to Bucharest that he would stay clear of political affairs.

Nonetheless he showed in his statement that he still believes the pre-Communist constitution of 1923, which provides for a king alongside a parliament, to be the legitimate one.

"His Majesty King Michael remains faithful to his oath made to the Romanian nation. He declares himself ready to serve the cause of the Romanian people above political interests or groups, in conformity with the prerogatives which are given him by the legitimate constitution of Romania," his statement said.

Explosion damages Luanda airport

LUANDA (R) — An explosion caused extensive damage to the centre of Luanda's international airport late Thursday night but were no immediate reports of casualties.

Airport security guards said passengers on a French UTA flight bound for Paris had already boarded their plane before the blast at 11:30 p.m. (2130 GMT). This was the only international flight out of Luanda during the evening.

Angolan Radio said the rebel UNITA movement was presumed to be responsible for the explosion, the second in the Angolan capital in two weeks. The radio said the previous blast at the Petrangol (Angola

Petroleum Company) refinery was UNITA sabotage.

UNITA, the U.S.-backed National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), has been fighting the leftist Luanda government since independence from Portugal 15 years ago.

Reporters were barred by a security officer from the blast site in the two-storey building but the damage was clearly visible.

The explosion had reduced a stairway to a mass of rubble and twisted stanchions. Wooden partitions were blown flat and the main entrance doors buckled outwards with the glass blown away.

Flights were proceeding normally Friday morning, including two international arrivals from Lisbon.

Deputy Foreign Minister Venancio da Moura, who inspected the damage, made no comment and refused to speculate on who was responsible.

UNITA and Angola's ruling MPLA-PT (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola-Labour Party) have held five rounds of peace talks. A sixth session is due to be held in Lisbon in January.

UNITA's radio, the Voice of the Resistance of the Black Cockerel, made no mention of the airport blast in its morning broadcast.

Gorbachev risks losing control — Lithuanian premier

SYDNEY (R) — The prime minister of Lithuania said Friday that embattled Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev might need the expanded powers given him by parliament but that he was on a dangerous course and risked losing control.

Kazimiera Prunskiene, whose government is seeking independence for the Baltic state, also warned that those additional powers should not be used against the Soviet Union's restive republics.

"Gorbachev has to manoeuvre and take into account the balance of power internally," she told reporters.

But she added: "This is a dangerous process which even for Gorbachev is difficult to control...these additional powers may not be used in dealing with the republics."

The Soviet Congress of People's Deputies this week gave Gorbachev additional powers that would allow him to rule by decree if necessary.

Prunskiene made her remarks after meeting Prime Minister Bob Hawke at Kirribilli House, the Australian leader's Sydney residence.

She said she gained his support for a Lithuanian information office in Canberra as well as

trade offices in Sydney and Melbourne and was optimistic that Australia would one day reciprocate.

She did not obtain full diplomatic recognition for Lithuania, a goal that she acknowledged to be a distant one.

The prime minister also said the West should make aid to the Soviet Union conditional to encourage Gorbachev to press ahead with democratic reforms.

"To help Gorbachev politically we need appropriate pressures with conditions. Help should be associated with a definite (reform) process."

Prunskiene, who arrived in

Australia Monday after a visit to Japan, said she hoped the Soviet Union would not try to recentralise power.

But she added that whatever Moscow did Lithuania would continue on its path to restore the independence it enjoyed between 1918 and 1940 when it was absorbed into the Soviet Union. "We are not part of that system," she said.

She also met opposition leader John Hewson and Primary Industries Minister John Kerin who said there was potential for trade but Lithuania had to clarify its relationship with Moscow first.

But, diplomats added, it was the obvious split in the party leadership which allowed the protests to gather momentum.

Even after the army crushed the demonstrations in June, 1989, prominent dissidents and student leaders such as Chai Ling and Wenjiabao fled the country to form opposition groups in exile. "This was severely embarrassing," another diplomat said.

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China reportedly continues military aid to Khmer Rouge despite denial

ARANYAPRATHET, Thailand (AP) — China still supplies military aid to Cambodia's Khmer Rouge guerrillas despite its claim to have halted shipments months ago, Western intelligence and other sources say.

"The Khmer Rouge are front-loading trucks and trucks of new Chinese ammunition," said one Western intelligence official who spoke on condition of anonymity. "There is a recent increase in Chinese supplies to the Khmer Rouge."

Other sources at this Thai border town and elsewhere along the Cambodian frontier said this week that the Chinese were preparing fresh deliveries of ammunition in anticipation of a government offensive against the guerrillas.

China is the main backer of the Communist Khmer Rouge and two other guerrilla groups fighting the government Vietnam installed in Phnom Penh after invading the country in late 1978. The Khmer Rouge, which was ousted from power by the invasion, is the strongest guerrilla army.

China said it had stopped military assistance after the five permanent members of the Un-

ited Nations Security Council, including China, adopted a peace plan for Cambodia in late August.

"Since the five member countries of the Security Council adopted the five documents on Cambodia, China has not provided any military assistance, including weapons," China's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Li Zhaoxing, said last month.

The guerrillas have supported the U.N. plan, which calls for significant U.N. involvement in the country's administration after a truce, and the holding of U.N. supervised elections. But the Vietnamese-installed government has rejected key elements of the plan.

With peace talks stalled, fighting has intensified in western Cambodia in the past month and government forces are preparing a major offensive in the approaching dry season, Western intelligence and guerrilla sources say.

They say the government is supported by Vietnamese troops who have secretly returned to Cambodia disguised as Cambodian government soldiers.

Vietnam says it withdrew all

troops from Cambodia in September 1989. But Western intelligence sources in Bangkok say they believe there are 4,000 to 9,000 Vietnamese military personnel in the country.

They say Vietnam has supplied large amounts of ammunition to the government in recent months.

Analysts say a halt of Chinese aid would cripple the two non-Communist guerrilla factions, the Khmer People's National Liberation Front and the forces of Prince Norodom Sihanouk. But it would have little effect on the Khmer Rouge, which has stockpiled enough weapons to last them for years, they said.

They said the Khmer Rouge also has large cash reserves to buy arms on the black market in case of an international cutoff. The radical group was responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Cambodians during its 3½-year rule after April 1975.

"If the Phnom Penh government chooses to fight it out with the Khmer Rouge," they are making a big mistake," said one intelligence analyst in Bangkok.

Kaifu to reshuffle cabinet today

TOKYO (R) — Japanese Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu agreed with ruling party leaders that he will reshuffle his cabinet Saturday in an apparent move to strengthen his standing.

"We have solved many pending issues, so we agreed to do this (reshuffle)," Ichiro Ozawa, secretary-general of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), told a news conference after meeting Kaifu Friday.

The issues Ozawa referred to were the government budget, to be formally announced Saturday, and the adoption of a party platform to reform Japan's unwieldy electoral system. Parliamentary sources said the reshuffle did not signal any major changes in Kaifu's domestic or foreign policy, although he may appoint a new foreign minister.

Finance Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto is expected to be retained because he has responsibility for next year's budget. Government legislation for the expected 70.35 trillion yen (\$52 billion) budget for the year starting in April will be submitted to parliament in January.

Kaifu is likely to move Justice Minister Seiichi Kajiyama, who came under attack both at home and abroad for racial remarks. Kajiyama, during a recent tour of Tokyo's seedy Shinjuku district, said blacks and prostitutes destroyed good neighbourhoods.

Kaifu has been reluctant to replace members of his cabinet, saying he faced major foreign and domestic issues.

But LDP bosses, eager to give posts to their subordinates, had been pressing for a reshuffle before the end of the year, the parliamentary sources said.

The prime minister's popularity has fallen from midsummer highs, partly because of an inability to push through policy proposals on the Gulf crisis.

Kaifu's poll rating now stands at about 45 per cent, down from about 63 per cent in July.

Without strong public support Kaifu, who rose to power from a tiny faction within the LDP, lacks the power to manoeuvre against party bosses such as former Premier Noboru Takeshita and former Finance Minister Michio Watanabe.

COLUMN

Tom Cruise marries Nicole Kidman

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Tom Cruise married Nicole Kidman, his co-star in Days Of Thunder, in a private ceremony at a Colorado ski resort. Few details about the Christmas Eve wedding were disclosed, but Cruise's spokeswoman, Andrea Jaffe, said a handful of family members witnessed the 30-minute civil ceremony. Honeymoon plans weren't disclosed. It was the first marriage for the Australian actress and the second for Cruise, whose nearly three-year marriage to actress Mimi Rogers ended in divorce in January. Cruise, 28, met Miss Kidman, 23, while filming Days Of Thunder. The couple are in pre-production for their next film together, The Irish Story directed by Ron Howard.

Thai thieves leave no signs

BANGKOK (R) — An unusual spate of highway robberies in northeast Thailand has left motorists scratching their heads. Thieves have been making off with traffic signs to sell as scrap metal, according to a report in Friday's Bangkok Post. Apparently the aluminum alloy used to make the signs can fetch 40-50 baht (about \$2) from scrap merchants.

L.A. police want a New Year's Eve ceasefire

LOS ANGELES (R) — Police reinforcements will be out in Los Angeles on New Year's Eve to discourage people from firing guns into the air to celebrate 1991, police said. "Every year, on Jan. 2, we count bullets that come back down to the ground," assistant police chief Robert Vernon said. "Unfortunately, we count some of these bullets in people." "We are going to blanket the city with police," he added. Gun shops in Los Angeles have been banned from selling ammunition for a week before the New Year holiday. Billboard posters urge people not to fire their guns on New Year's Eve. In one of the worst outbreaks of firing on New Year's Eve, Los Angeles police had 1,247 reports of gunfire in 1988.

New York police probe bomb threat

NEW YORK (R) — New York authorities are investigating a possible plot to blow up sites along a city waterfront on New Year's Eve, police said. A police spokesman said a map found by a subway rider showed seven industrial sites along the waterfront in Brooklyn, a New York borough. The map, turned over to police, indicated that bombs would explode at the sites on New Year's Eve. CBS local television news reported Thursday that a source told them there were notations on the map in Arabic. Police said the map had notations in English. "We have a joint investigation going on, and we won't comment on any writing because it could be evidence in the future," said the spokesman. But he said: "You better believe we're taking this threat very seriously." He said one of the sites on the map, searched by the bomb squad and anti-terrorist task force, was the Con Edison Complex which houses big gas tanks.

Country singers to build a club

MEMPHIS, Tennessee (AP) — Country entertainers Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson are joining forces to develop a club where they can perform from time to time. The club, to be called "Waylon and Willie's Cafe," will be on the city's Mud Island Tourist Park which is undergoing renovation as a companion project to the Great American Pyramid. The pyramid, a 32-storey, stainless steel structure, is scheduled to open next summer. Mud Island, a struggling nearby tourist park, is being refurbished to become "festival island." The island and pyramid, though both owned by local government, will be run by private companies controlled by businessman Sidney Shlenker. Jennings said the club he plans with Nelson will have about 200 seats. Jennings said he and Nelson will perform there several times a year, but he didn't say exactly how many. Mud Island is a three-mile-long (5-kilometre) sandbar in the Mississippi River. Most of the island is being developed as residential property.